



March 2013

Research Report

Florida MarketMaker
USDA & FDACS

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Center for Public Issues Education
IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UFIFAS

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Background

Currently funded by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and other contributing organizations, Florida MarketMaker is a free, web-based marketing tool created to assist producers and consumers of specialty crops to establish relationships in local and regional markets. Since the creation of Florida MarketMaker, more than three years ago, the resource has approximately 160 registered users with profiles, considerably less than anticipated. By developing and utilizing targeted messages that are effective with producers and consumers of Florida specialty crops, the number of users is expected to increase.

By further understanding the needs of small producers and consumers, researchers may be able to analyze and determine how to enhance Florida MarketMaker to meet needs and be used to its full potential, resulting in an increase of users. Ultimately, increased usage would lead to the growth and support of the Florida agriculture industry as a whole.

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of the marketing tool, Florida MarketMaker, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) sought out and received a Florida Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) from FDACS, with the funding originating from USDA. The grant enabled the PIE Center to conduct a qualitative analysis of small farmers within the state and discover their opinions and perceptions of the tool.

Methods

Problem

This research investigated the cause of the disconnect between Florida specialty crop producers and the use of Florida MarketMaker in an effort to gain a better understanding of what message strategies should be used to promote Florida MarketMaker. Additionally, research provided information about what aspects of the design might be inhibiting the usability of the resource. All research was conducted in an attempt to better position Florida-grown specialty crops as the choice for local consumer-based buyers.

Research Design

Based on components outlined in the SCGB, the PIE Center used a qualitative, focus group design. The qualitative methodology was used to analyze producers' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions regarding Florida MarketMaker. The objective of using focus group methodology was to assess the target audience's perceptions of current usability and brand salience of Florida MarketMaker and to test for new branding and usability strategies before redeveloping the marketing plan and website. Additionally, the research provided a more thorough understanding of current marketing and sales strategies used by small producers.

The PIE Center conducted six focus groups to identify messages that could resonate with producers and consumers using Florida MarketMaker as a marketing tool to connect these two groups in local markets. Two focus groups, comprised of Florida producers of both small and medium-scale operations, were conducted in Quincy, two groups in Kissimmee, and one in Sarasota. A final focus group took place in Orlando involving UF/IFAS extension agents who are involved on the Small Farms team to determine their opinions of the effectiveness of Florida MarketMaker, seek feedback on how their clients view the tool and how to improve the website. Qualitative design provided the researcher with information and findings that have yet to be hypothesized and can therefore not have been predicted. Such findings allow the researcher to build off of the data for further detailed research about this area of interest.

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To maintain a level of consistency and accountability, the PIE Center utilized an outside firm to recruit participants from the predetermined population. The Florida Survey Research Center (FSRC), a UF auxiliary, was responsible for participant recruitment and developing screening questions to ensure the target audience was accurately represented. Potential participants were also asked questions to determine whether or not they fit the definition of a Florida small-farm producer for the purpose of this study, as well as their level of awareness of the online marketing tool.

Target Audience

The target audience was Florida small farmers growing and producing agricultural products for the purpose of sale. Names and contact information of small farmers in Florida were provided to the PIE Center to be included in participant lists. All selected participants had some connection with the agriculture industry. Examples of participants included and were not limited to growers and producers of fruit and vegetables, produce, beef, lamb and dairy, bees, herbs and other specialty crops. Some participants were members of Community Supported Agriculture groups (CSAs), while others produced and marketed on an individual basis. The size of each participant's operation varied, with some businesses operating on a more corporate level with employees and assistants while others had an operation for personal enjoyment and worked independently. The experience level of the participants ranged from farmers who produced as their primary source of income to hobby farmers and part-time farmers.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Prior to conducting focus groups, the PIE Center developed a moderator's guide, which was reviewed by a panel of experts. The written moderator's guide remained constant throughout the five focus groups with specialty crop producers to allow for comparisons, differing only with the group of extension agents.

Present during each focus group was a moderator, assistant moderator/note taker and a second note taker. The purpose of note takers was to provide back up data. The use of note takers ensured the reliability of the data in the case that the electronic equipment malfunctioned. Additionally, the use of video and audio recorders during each focus group ensured the accuracy of data collected. Video and audio recorders allowed for a more thorough understanding of participants' feelings in order to better apply findings to the entire population. An outside transcription analyst was used to provide thorough, word-for-word transcripts for analysis. All research was conducted under approval of the UF Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of human subjects.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted on the transcripts, via the qualitative data analysis software, Weft-QDA. Transcripts were analyzed by the researcher going through each individual question across each focus group so one question was analyzed across the entire group of focus groups before the next question was examined. An audit trail to secure chronological records and provide documentary evidence of the sequence of events of research was implemented and maintained throughout the research process.

Results

The moderator's guide was set up in four sections to move the conversation along in a progressive manner. Participants were first asked about their current marketing strategies, followed by their awareness of Florida MarketMaker and then were asked to give specific opinions of each page of the Florida MarketMaker website. Lastly, participants were asked for suggestions and changes they would make to increase the usage of Florida MarketMaker.

Current Marketing Practices

When discussing the current communication practices used by participants, common methods of marketing included a business website with up-to-date information about the farm and the services or products it provides, as well as weekly or monthly newsletters via email and some hand-written communication. Below are the different strategies in which participants have marketed or are currently marketing their products:

Word-of-Mouth

A major theme reiterated throughout the discussion was the importance of word-of-mouth and how vital it had been to spreading awareness about a small farm. In fact, many participants described word-of-mouth as the most important method of communication and essential to business success. It is crucial that a reputation be positive in order to ensure new customers and sales. In addition, presence at Farmer's Markets allowed many producers to share information and spread news by word-of-mouth. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme¹:

- A participant discussed the value of creating a specific environment in addition to maintaining a good reputation that will travel by word-of-mouth. The participant said, "You said the word-of-mouth thing, which is the best marketing you can get. But, one of the things we found that you have to do is you have to give them some kind of experience when they come. It's not always about the product; it's about the experience. And particularly in the small markets, and so we go out of our way. . . . We change things up quite a bit every year, and we learn every year."
- In response to the previous statement, one participant agreed and added the importance of maintaining frequent communication. This participant said, "Yeah, a lot of ours is word-of-mouth. And then following up on . . . once we get the information, just like what he was saying, it is really important to stay up on emailing them and letting them know . . . communication is just huge."
- One participant mentioned how a nearby farmer, selling different products, sends customers to them and vice versa. This participant said, "(name omitted)'s email that she sends out, she has links to our farm, we have links to her farm. So, that it really is a community effort by the small farmers in the community to make sure that our community knows what is going on."
- An extension agent shared the value of word-of-mouth combined with other marketing techniques. This participant said, "Well, I think what you are saying is right. And I don't care what kind of product or service you have, you can't use just one vehicle to get you there. And what I have found is that the over-60 crowd, word-of-mouth is the way you market. We had a guy, a group of guys, that started growing Satsuma citrus, and they got their name out by doing a fundraiser sale through the schools. They only did that for two years. It was enough to get a name out there, now people come directly to the farm to buy it year after year. It is a short duration, you know, it is right between Thanksgiving and Christmas, every year. And they have built a following. So, really all we are talking about is using a variety of methods to get there."

¹ Grammar and punctuation within the quotations appear as transcribed and may therefore not be grammatically correct. This is common practice for focus group methodology to maintain the credibility of the statements.

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Create a Personal Connection

Good communication is key in successful businesses as it showcases the strength of the relationship between the producers and consumers. Participants emphasized the importance of staying up-to-date with consumers, stating that it helped create a personal connection that did not feel corporate.

Creating and Maintaining a Personal Relationship with Customers

Participants in each focus group emphasized the importance of maintaining a personal connection with consumers. Not only was it important to maintain a local, small-farm feel but also to create a relationship and loyalty with their consumers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- Reiterating what had already been said about treating customers like friends, one participant said, “Well, you hit the nail on the head when you said that you had friends and not customers. That is a big part of why those people come back to you every year. It is the same thing at our place.”

Personal vs. Corporation Feel

Creating a “buying from the farmer” mentality is crucial to creating a lasting business. In order to stand out, participants stated they must create a different buying experience than what is available in corporate stores. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A blueberry farmer discussed how he creates a total experience for consumers when they come to U-pick stating, “Once everybody is done, we have got a pitcher pump right there. They pump the pitcher pump and rinse their hands. ‘Oh, my grandmother had one.’ The whole thing is . . . perpetuate being at the farm. When they see the old tractors and the stuff like that, they don’t see the pesticides and the fertilizers and everything else.”
- A participant mentioned how the idea of experiencing life on the farm and meeting a farmer is trending at the moment. He said, “Being in touch with the farmer is one of the greatest things that is going on right now, these days. OK? These people are coming out of places and going and visiting the farmer to see how their food is grown. To see what we do to make it happen and everything. And they are enjoying the heck out of it. They think it is better than Disney World.”

Personal Guarantee

Participants stressed the importance of building relationships between the seller and consumer based on loyalty. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant, who said he has people who now expect a hug, talked about the importance of creating a different, personal experience to stand out among other businesses. This participant said, “I mean, that is the only thing that keeps it really special . . . is what is different about what we are doing as opposed to the normal place that is getting the product that is already out there. What does the small farmer have to do to make it any more special? And it might just be that personal service. And I mean, the hugs do an awful lot. It’s amazing, you know?”
- Another participant expressed the value of selling directly to customers and offered some insight into the online world. This participant said, “There’s a real loyalty that develops though, whether it’s online or whether it’s direct, whether they come to your farm to purchase or whether you take it to a market. That loyalty develops, and it’s pretty hard to shake. And so, we see that loyalty developing online as well. As long as they are served well, you know?”

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U-pick

Some participants discussed the growing demand and public interest for U-pick at a farm. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant discussed how much people like their children to experience the farm life by stating, “You put strawberry onions in, and they get a big kick out of coming out, particularly organic people, of coming out and taking a picture of their kid pulling the onion up. And you will say, ‘Well, what does it cost?’ Two bucks.”
- Another participant discussed their operation as, “It is a little diversified. It is a little of each and then we did U-pick this year for the first time, which is wonderful.”
- A participant discussed part of his specific U-pick strategy for selling blueberries. He said, “For instance, if you pick a gallon of blueberries and pick me a gallon of blueberries, I’ll give you the blueberries free. We have a . . . your blueberries free, your gallon free, that kind of thing. And they bring the kids out, they do all that kind of stuff and we encourage it. One of the things we’re very careful about and strawberry growers are notorious for, ‘If you come out in my strawberry grove, don’t eat any strawberries.’ Well, we give a lecture to everybody that comes on the place, very short, 30-second lecture, ‘Watch out for rattlesnakes, haven’t seen any, but they could be there, blah, blah, blah.’ But, the most important thing at the very end is, ‘Eat all you want while you’re out there and have a big time doing it.’ And they enjoy that experience. They come back every year because they know their kids can be out there and nobody’s gonna be over their shoulder watching them and that kind of thing.”

Create a Positive, Casual Buying Environment

Amidst the discussion, participants stressed the importance of creating a casual, comfortable buying environment where consumers feel as though they are purchasing from a local farmer instead of a corporation. Emphasis was placed on this as many stated this was crucial to the success of a small farmer wanting to market and sell his or her products. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant shared how he creates an environment around the necessary operational equipment to attract customers. This participant said, “Now, the packing shed is an open shed. It is not fancy at all. It looks like an old farm building that just happens to have a washing machine inside of it. And then we have piles of oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, lemons, and so on and so forth. They are right there piled out, ready to go. All of those are my forms of advertising.”

Provide Samples

Participants seemed to agree that by providing samples at farmer’s markets or at the farm, consumers would pay premium prices once they have tasted a quality product. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant who used to attend farmer’s markets talked about how people would pay premium price for quality products after sampling them. This participant said, “We would take a basket of strawberries, set them out there . . . now, our hydroponic strawberries . . . we sell for \$5.00 a pound. It doesn’t matter what time of season it is, it is the same price if we come in before California, or after. We set out a basket, let people try them. They will walk right past the truck farmers once they try them. Because we do, we pick them. . . . I am out there at first light picking to open by 10:00.”
- Another participant agreed with the previous participant and said, “Yeah, samples are worth a million bucks.”

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- A third customer reiterated the same idea and said, “\$3.50 a pound, I sell them right across the sidewalk from somebody who is selling them for a buck and a half. And the slices are out on the table and when you have them face-to-face, it is all about the samples.”
- A participant stressed how by providing samples, they create a scenario where every purchaser is already satisfied because they decide to buy based on price. This then creates a sense of loyalty in a their customer base. This participant said, “We give free first time, like we’ve give them a pound of meat or some fleece or, you know, a couple of our vegetables and let them try them. And then they come back if they want it instead of buying something and not liking it, we give them a chance to buy.”

Provide Recipes

Providing recipes was one of the ways participants shared information with the public about local food. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant shared how they will seek the help of a local chef to do cooking demonstrations at farmer’s markets. This not only promotes the products but also provides consumers with new ideas as to how to prepare the food. This participant said, “One of the ideas that we have been doing is that one of the local farmer’s markets has . . . we have a chef who does food demonstrations. And she will take our produce and cook like . . . this weekend we had eggplant and squash. We do vegetables. So, the eggplant and the squash and the zucchini, she would do in a wrap on the grill. And it kind of helps promote the sales of what we have because people sometimes just don’t know what to do with vegetables.”
- Another participant shared the importance of sharing recipes to help sell their products. This participant said, “So, sometimes I will hand out recipes or this or that, or I will go online and I will research a lot of different things. And I will share that research with them to give them an idea that they can do a lot more with that than what they have been accustomed to. So, that alone kind of broadens my market a little bit with the little that I have to work with.”

Maintain Correspondance

By sending out weekly or monthly newsletters, producers were able to notify consumers of new products available as well as keep in touch to maintain a business relationship. Many participants discussed the variety of communication tactics used to reach a wide array of audiences. In addition to email listservs, lists of customers were obtained for email and mail purposes by personal signups at many of the individual farms.

- An extension agent offered advice on creating a brand and gaining repeat customers through frequent communication. This participant said, “They have got a newsletter, and they will send that out every month. It may be an e-newsletter, maybe a hard copy, depending on who their clientele is. But, they are constantly putting themselves . . . they are not dependent on them to go search on the Internet for them. . . . They are getting their name out intentionally themselves to whoever they have on a mailing list or an email list or whatever. Because out of sight is out of mind. And if I have got to physically go and look something up . . . I mean, how many websites do we have on campus? Hundreds of thousands, I am not going to go search everybody’s website. I might go look at [name omitted]’s, if I thought well, he has got something and I want to see what he is doing today, I have worked with him some. Or, I might look at one that [name omitted] has or somebody else. But I am not going to search the mass jillions of people’s websites. But, if I get your email address and I can send you a little newsletter

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about once a month, a little thought for the day or something that is timely and whatever . . . if it's produce, what is fixing to be harvested; if it is livestock, what is fixing to be marketed . . . whatever. It gives me a chance to sell myself, sell my brand, to you.”

Personal, Handmade Mail

Some participants stated their personal value of a hand-written note and its ability to surpass electronic communication by creating a more personal relationship between the producer and consumer. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who still includes hand-written notes in his mailings to customers said, “We do run a computer label, but we put a hand stamp on it. And then I sit there at night watching TV and write little personal notes up where it has my name on the return address on it. I will write something like, ‘Hope to see you this year,’ or, ‘How is your granddaughter?’ We like to tell people that we don’t have customers; we have friends that buy and ship fruit with us. We are very personable.”
- A participant agreed with that, saying “And sometimes that little handwritten thing . . . it is true, that is what gets them coming.”

Electronic Mail

Participants discussed communication via the Internet by using email correspondence. One participant stated he did not have time to keep up with emails, but most of the other participants shared that emailing consumers allowed them to quickly notify customers of the products available as well as, in some instances, let consumers know where the farms will be selling their products, if at other venues aside from the actual farm, such as a farmer’s market. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant shared how she has developed a listserv of customers, whom she will notify what is available the upcoming week. She said, “Over two years . . . I started with 17, in the first year we ended up with over 700 and now she is somewhere around 1,500 individuals who I have on a, what I call a ‘Customer Notification List. And I take and every week, on a Sunday, I sit down and figure out what I am going to have for that week, and I make up that list and I shoot it out.”
- Another participant shared how their farm notifies customers by email of what they have preordered for that week. This participant said, “And then we do the emails to the customers with what they are going to be getting that week, so that they can kind of prepare and not buy other things and duplicate what they are getting from us. But, it helps.”

Newsletters (Weekly, Monthly or Quarterly)

A number of participants stated that they use weekly, monthly, or even quarterly newsletters to share information about the farm and upcoming sales with consumers. The following quote is an example of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed how their newsletter included information about their farm as well as updated news and new products. This participant said, “The other marketing tool we use is, we do send out a newsletter, which is basically a ‘Life on the Farm,’ . . . we are selling this or that, or this is happening.”

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Throughout the discussion, the need to educate consumers about local agriculture and products available as well as the benefits associated with purchasing local food was discussed. Some participants combined marketing tactics such as a newsletter to also assist and educate consumers.

- Another participant shared how their newsletter includes information about other farms as well. This participant said, “We use the weekly newsletter also as a platform to educate people about what is in season...about what other farmers are doing, what is going on in the community. So, it really becomes . . . if I don’t do it, I get in a little bit of trouble with people because they are depending on it for information.”

Use of Website

Due to the shift from traditional marketing techniques, such as print and radio, participants stated that a web presence has almost become a necessity. A website allows for constant communication between the producer and consumer and many participants listed their website as the primary method to get information about their farm to the consumers. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant stressed the need for an Internet presence when the participant states in a stern manner, “A web presence is almost mandatory now. If you have absolutely nothing on the web, you’re kind of sunk.”
- A participant agreed and added, “Our website has brought all those people to the farm. That is our biggest marketing tool.”

In addition, participants also stressed that the quality of the product should not decrease as a result of online sales. Maintaining the same quality online as would be available in person was important for the participants.

Ag Tourism

Participants stated how they take advantage of the possible agritourism available in Florida. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who used U-pick as a way to market and sell their products talked about how they take advantage of tourists traveling to amusement parks in Florida. This participant said, “We also do a little bit of [agritourism]. You are welcome to go . . . you bring Grandma down from Michigan, and she gets to go out in the grove and actually pick an orange off the tree and we encourage them to take a picture.”
- In response, a participant said, “Yeah, they will drive in, they will come in to Disneyland, Epcot, stuff like this. A lot of them will come in and hit Clearwater to vacation on the beach. As they are traveling over, they will stop and pick up 10 or 15 pounds of berries for the kids to eat on the way.”
- Another participant discussed how they create an entire farm tour of sorts to offer an experience for visitors in the state. This participant said, “And from there we went to inviting people out for little tours of our farm, bring your family and they really liked being able to see what farm life is like. We’ll let the children collect eggs and then the parents will buy the eggs that their kids collect so we sell those eggs right off the farm.”

Road Signs/ Billboards

In order to advertise the presence of a local farm, some participants communicated about the usage of road signs on heavily populated highways to lead tourists and other travelers to their farm. Of those participants who utilized this

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marketing tactic, participants stated that it was effective in drawing people in, particularly on their way out of the state. Participants also reported being able to develop a customer base from road sign marketing because customers would often request to be on an email list and, as a result, became return customers.

Although not used extensively to market products, one participant discussed the use of billboards to promote his products to tourists or others who may be interested because he is located off the interstate. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who takes advantage of travelers and uses signage to attract their attention said, “Yeah, our whole farm is only a 100-foot wide. But, it is a quarter-mile long. It is a little over three acres. So, we have the Burma-Shave signs, ‘Welcome to our farm.’ And we have some others with catchy sayings like, ‘A plump wife and a big barn never did a man harm.’”

Campground Brochures

One participant stated they used the strategy of leaving brochures at campgrounds throughout the area to promote their business. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme.

- She said, “We also stop by the local campgrounds and leave a stack of brochures there. You would be surprised the people that stay and they want to take a bag of fruit with them and all that. But, we don’t buy mailing lists from anywhere or anything like that.”

Outside Marketing

Aside from direct marketing and selling from individual farms, participants discussed involvement in other organizations as ways to market products.

Web-Based Services

Websites such as LocalHarvest and Red Hills Alliance were brought up often during discussion, with the former being mentioned in every focus group and the latter mentioned frequently in focus groups in North Florida. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussing past involvement on LocalHarvest said, “When I was on there and had a presence there, I did get responses from a few people there.”
- Another participant who wanted to use the Internet more but was limited with time said, “I mean, I have got some mornings where I have got things to do, and I end up spending my entire morning in the office just answering the phone with people calling looking for organic chicken, organic eggs, or some type of a value-added product. They are calling around wanting somebody to point them in the right direction. And it really doesn’t exist out there with the exception of LocalHarvest.”
- One participant shared how her entire community came together to make plans to attract tourists and promote agriculture in their town. She said, “Our community is putting together bed and breakfast packages to get people to come and to stay in Jefferson County. And Jefferson County really considers themselves, honorably, a very rural county. And they are striving to maintain that atmosphere and ambiance and all, and actually trying to develop it as a destination spot because of our rural roots.”

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Farmer's Markets

The opinion of farmer's markets varied among the participants. While some shared that farmer's markets were where they really got started selling their own products, others blamed them, stating they are a waste of time. Food demonstrations at markets seem to be a positive driving force for purchasing local food. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant shared how she gained most of her market by attending farmer's markets and becoming known in the community. She said, "Marketing . . . I started out, let's see, marketing by going to the local farmer's markets and that's where I met [name omitted] and [name omitted]. That was very successful for me, and it actually created a market that we have now that means that we really don't have to go to those outdoor markets anymore."
- Another participant, just getting into farming with his wife, stated how he quit his day job to farm full time. This participant said about his business and farmer's markets, "We do the little things that you are talking about, the farmer's market. But we are starting out, my wife and I. I have been doing farmer's markets for 10 years, but it has always been a part-time deal, because I always had a full-time job. This is the first year where it is our only income, and we are now committed to doing it full time. So, we are trying to expand our farm. So, we've . . . we are grateful for the farmer's markets, but everything you say . . . you work so hard and get a rainout or something, it is a huge disappointment. Of course, we are dealing with a very conventional product, citrus. So, how do you make it different from a Costco? And we are not completely organic either, at this point. We haven't transitioned yet. So, we tell people what we are and how we grow it and why it is a good product. And we do less than 24 hours off the tree, is generally almost always our principle or practice that we follow. Sometimes we do 48 hours off the tree."
- One participant talked about their involvement with farmer's markets and demonstrations. This participant said, "But the food demonstrations have been something that potentially can help us move things forward with the farmer's market that we are working with."
- Another participant shared how the environment of the farmer's market is what she missed most. Speaking about her experiences, she said, "Well, we have a distributor. And he sells to the high-end market, high-end restaurants. We tried to market at the farmer's market a couple of times and loved it because I like people. I like teaching them and telling them what my belief in what food should be. But, there is just not enough manpower to go around. It is just me and my children."
- Irritated by the amount of time required to attend multiple farmer's markets in a week, one participant said, "But . . . and going through the whole marketing thing, you know, I started with farmer's markets, man what a waste of time, what a frigging waste of time. You grow it, you harvest it, you transport it, you spend all that energy and cost, and getting it just to that point. Then you put it in a truck, you carry it to a market and it gets rained out. Or it's an off day and everybody's at the football game or, you know, you end up with all this product, all this investment for nothing. You know, it goes right back to the compost pile. So, farmer's markets are a total waste in my book."

Become Member of CSAs

A number of participants discussed their involvement with CSAs. While some stated the importance of it to their income, others mentioned that it required a lot of time and effort that was not always available to give. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A small farm participant said in response to discussion about CSAs, “I guess I would say CSA is good if you’ve got a crew, if you’ve got a labor force.”
- A participant, who farms on his own, discussed how being a part of a CSA provides insurance for his farming. He said, “I’m also a one-person operation basically, so a CSA is, I think, a very viable model. And maybe the ideal because then you’ve got folks that are vested and if the crop doesn’t do all that well, you just substitute more carrots or whatever, you know. So, you got their money, they’re supporting you as a farmer growing it locally, and growing it for them. And that’s a safeguard, that’s an insurance, that’s crop insurance and it’s also a guaranteed market. So, I don’t know of a better thing out there.”

One participant discussed the value of taking part in a community garden:

- “Yeah, we have got . . . on our farm, we gave them about a 200-by-200 section. And we partnered with the Hyde Point Community Center to get the families. They do all the screening and background checks and everything. And then they would come out like Saturday morning and Thursday afternoon and work on the farm. And we had the first USDA-certified community garden in the state of Florida. So, you know, it is kind of neat.”

Red Hills Involvement

Some participants stated their involvement with Red Hills Farm Alliance and credited involvement with some of the success of selling their products. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed the ease that comes along with involvement in the Red Hills Farm Alliance. This participant said, “It has some advantages. You are not going to a farmer’s market where you’re picking everything and then hoping you can sell it. You have an exact amount that you are picking. It is already prepaid for. Everything is done, and the online market pays you, writes you a check.”
- Another participant said Red Hills helped their business. This participant said, “And then the other very good marketing tool for me is using Red Hills online. That is really the only outside thing that we do at this point.”
- A participant who was pleased with their involvement in Red Hills said, “Now, we do the online market, the Red Hills Online Market, and that is growing like grass.”

Farm Tour

A number of participants stated that they were able to gain notoriety by taking part in farm tours that would promote their farms and products to other farmers and, as a result, the public. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme, specifically the New Leaf Market Tour:

- A participant who garnered loyalty from customers as a result of a farm tour said, “One of the biggest things actually that helped me, which goes along with the people that know you are a farmer type thing, was a New Leaf Market tour. That has made the difference. People come out to the farm, they see the animals, they know how they are raised, they see just how things look. And people like to deal with people that they feel like they know or they trust. Well, this is my farmer, basically. To these loyal customers, you are their farmer. And they feel very proud of that. And I don’t care how low the price would go at Walmart, they are still going to go to [name omitted]. But that personal attention of being able to come to your location or your farm really makes a big difference. And I think that was the turnaround for us.”

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- A participant with ideas for a statewide farm tour shared, “So, I have talked with them . . . early on I talked with them about, how can this farm tour benefit the farm community? What could we do? Could we have a scholarship? Could we have . . . ? You know? And it never really has gotten off the ground. And now with the Small Farm Alliance, we are working with New Leaf as a sponsor. But we are hoping that our member farms will then show their membership in the Small Farm Alliance, which will develop some recognition. And I think anything that we do to benefit the community, we are going to have to do. New Leaf is not going in that direction. But, the state for instance, could do something statewide where people bought a ticket. That money could go to . . . Agriculture in the Classroom . . . although I know that Monsanto supports Agriculture in the Classroom very heavily now.”

Marketing Angle/Uniqueness

Participants discussed the different angles they took to market their products. Angles included the types of products sold as well as the way the products were sold and distributed.

- A participant who stressed the need to be unique in today’s market stated, “Or they are grown without the pesticides, it is organic. I mean, that is the only thing that keeps it really special . . . is what is different about what we are doing as opposed to the normal place that is getting the product that is already out there. What does the small farmer have to do to make it any more special?”

Fresh Products

Providing fresh products for consumers was discussed as a way to segregate a local product from one sold at a corporate, large store. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant who has his trees picked every day uses that as a marketing tool to stand out amongst retail stores. This participant said, “I have got a fellow that comes and picks every day and that is part of our advertising. ‘Guys, we pick it every day.’ It is not been off the tree . . . you can go to the grocery store and get an old orange. You can come here and you know that it was on the tree less than 24 hours ago. And so the sweetness, the freshness, the people’s faces, they light up, they go, ‘Wow.’”

Organic Products

During the discussion some participants stressed their value of organic products and how such products can be marketed in a unique manner to target specific audiences and stand out among other products. The ability to price the products at a higher rate was also mentioned by some participants. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant shared what he thought were the best marketing tools in farming today. He said, “And now being organic, being local, being small farmer; those are so big marketing tools right now.”
- Another participant said he is able to ask a premium price for his unique, organic products. This participant said, “You know, for us when we started there and we were the only organic growers there . . . aside from being one of the only growers there, we were the only organic growers, and we priced our things higher. And resellers and other farmers look at and go, ‘You what?’ ‘You’re getting three dollars a pound for tomatoes?’ Or, ‘You’re charging this much for beans?’ And for us, we’re like, ‘Well, yeah. We have to, we’re doing the work, we’re trying to stay alive, we’re trying to stay in business,’ and maybe there’s some . . . the resistance is not there now, there was

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some resistance and the people that have a resistance to the price, bless them, somebody else will come and buy it at the price that we need.”

Diversified Products

A number of participants discussed marketing diversified crops to create a demand for multiple products. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who stressed taking the time to look at your market before deciding what to grow said, “The first question about how would we market all of this stuff, I mean you have got to look at your markets. Is it a posh market? Is it a local market? Is it a fruit stand market? I mean, I think that is the kind of marketing that I am approaching. And I can probably presume everybody else is, too. We are looking at choosing out of those markets: posh, local, marketing, distributing . . . at a lower level. Do I have something special that is going to make my product more special than the lemons that you can get over at Publix? What is different? You have got all that kind of stuff.”
- Another participant agreed and said, “But you know, to be diverse, that is important, to try to.”
- Lastly, a participant discussed having a special customer base for his unique products. This participant said, “Fortunately everything we grow at the farm, we grow and we put on the availability list for our customers, and it is to have something different that another distributor might not have. So, I also have a market for my products, so I am blessed that way as well. But, without those we would have had to have sold the farm a long time ago. It’s tough.”

Quality Products

Consistency and quality of products was discussed often amongst participants to ensure loyalty of customers. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- Discussing quality of products, one participant said it is one of the most valuable aspects of having a good business. This participant said, “Like [name omitted] said, when people come to the market, they look at that stuff you got on your table, and if it doesn’t look good, they’re not gonna buy it. You know, so you’re the . . . especially when we’re direct marketing. Your customer is gonna tell you what they want and what quality they want.”
- Simply put, one participant said of quality, “And it’s consistency, you know, you gotta be consistent.”

Meet Personal Requests by Restaurants

Some participants, one in particular, made great strides in the expansion of his business by meeting the individual requests of restaurant chefs and dropping the products off when they become available. In some instances, this was valuable as farmers were providing chefs with unique products that were sometimes unavailable in the store, causing farmers to get a high price. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who grows unique vegetables and herbs for restaurants said, “But, the high-end restaurants we service . . . we grow the unusual. Anything different.”
- Another participant agreed with the last and shared how by understanding chefs one can create lasting relationships to sell unique products. This participant said, “You have a unique product, it is fresh, it is local, and it is delivered daily. We are in the same boat right there. We are in a very unique position being in Vero Beach. It

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is a retired executive area. We have been there almost 20 years; we have been certified since 1996. We started working with the chefs back then. And you have to listen to those guys. They are artists, and they can be hard to deal with and stuff. But, once you start growing what they want or . . . if you are limited by where you are and what you can grow on your farm. And what you want to do is make sure what you are growing is profitable. You know if you are trying to grow something that is not profitable and not marketable, then you go backwards. We deal with a lot of the high-end restaurants . . . like we do a spring mix and it is double what Earthbound sells for.”

- A participant who also works closely with chefs reiterated those thoughts and said, “It is incredible. And you have to use those. What we do is, we have been out there a while, so we know what we need to plant. But we have a chef leave a voicemail, an email, Twitter, Facebook; anyway that they want to drop orders for us now. And we pick them up at the morning that they leave their message, however they do it and we cut to their order, we deliver that day. We charge what the market will bear.”
- A participant who takes a casual approach with the chefs in her area said, “We just took our product, walked into the back door of the restaurant and dropped it off. They can’t say no if you have a quality product.”

Sell Year Round

While a great deal of farming is seasonal, some participants stated that by growing crops year round, they were able to meet demands of customers during specific times of the year and generate more profits year round. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who finds value in selling year round products said of another participant who does, “There are some producer-only markets that have kind of branched off. It might suit your needs to create one like that. It is tricky because you do need to attract a big group, but in your case, what is interesting is that you were saying that you are providing product year round. Oftentimes, markets want the resellers because they can provide the year round product.”
- Another participant chimed in to offer some advice on selling year round and said, “Some are year round and others are strictly seasonal. But, for those year-round markets, that is a compelling reason. They want to have that year-round product. If you can provide enough volume and you can draw enough people, and find a happy medium, it might be viable for you to do that.”

Provide Custom Delivery

While one participant elaborated on their strategy to custom deliver products to customers and the success it has brought to their business, others mentioned doing such a thing but did not elaborate on the topic. The method of offering a personal delivery was most common among specialty flower producers. This method allowed producers who used this method of selling to have a personal relationship with their customers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- The participant who offers personal delivery to customers said, “So, we started making, kind of custom deliveries, and that has worked out well for us.”

Retail Stand

Although there was some discussion about utilizing a retail stand to provide customers with an opportunity to purchase local food, it was not discussed in a great amount of detail. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A participant who attracts people traveling to and from a shopping mall discussed the value of having a retail stand, “Yeah, and we also do a farmer’s market and we also have a retail stand. You know, we are down a dirt road, we are not out far, we are right next to . . . we are about a mile away from a big mall, so we do have people coming out there. But I don’t have . . . I can’t justify putting somebody in there. We have an honor system.”

Partnerships and Referrals

Participants stated the value of working together with other farmers to not only provide products to consumers but also to support and recommend one another. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed partnerships and the value of working with other farmers. This participant said, “We’ve developed quite a few partnerships with people throughout the county and tri-state area to where they take the products that we have and they take it to the next level. We work with them and then we benefit from what they sell. So, not only is income derived locally, income is derived from other people doing the work, so it’s worked for us.”
- One participant shared how they support other farmers in the community by referring customers to them. This participant said, “..... Farms down in Punta Gorda. there helps us a lot because she doesn’t sell meat. So, people ask her and I am sure like they ask you guys, “Where can I get beef or pork or chickens?” And so, she does...referral is a big one for us from the local farms that we have around us.”
- A participant who valued the word-of-mouth from other customers said, “And repeat customers. Referrals from them.”

Use of Social Media

Social Media was brought up multiple times during discussion with the understanding that it targets the younger generation who expects a wide web presence. Facebook was the most common social media platform used among the participants, with Twitter mentioned in a secondary manner. Some participants stated that they used their personal Facebook page to display pictures and increase word-of-mouth, while others had specific business pages that they updated more regularly than their website. However, one participant mentioned that social media has the expectation of more frequent updates and more up-to-date presence than a website. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant with positive thoughts about social media but no experience themselves said, “Now, the social media is certainly something that I have heard works.”
- Another participant echoed the thoughts of the first participant and said, “And a web presence is almost mandatory now. If you have absolutely nothing on the web, you’re kind of sunk.”
- A participant who names all of her animals and lets people come out and experience sheep sheering and goat milking days on the farm said, “We post pictures of our animals and give updates. All of our animals have names and that seems to draw a lot of attention because everybody likes to have some connection with farm animals. You know, everybody’s got a name. When we have babies born, we’ll post videos of the little babies, so that keeps drawing people in.”
- An extension agent credited people’s lack of understanding of the Internet to why social media is not used much

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for marketing products. This participant said, “I think, or at least in my experience, it is growing; your blogs and your Facebooks, any of the social media. And I think one of the challenges that was said before, about we have producers that are not comfortable or not very eloquent in expressing who they are or what they stand for. But, they can get on and have a Facebook account or a blog where they can put in their daily kind of journal or whatever what that are doing. And over time, those people that visit there can come to know them, which kind of builds that brand, I think.”

- Another extension agent agreed and added, “You are talking about a clientele that is 40 and younger. In the 60s and older are not doing it because they are intimidated by it, they are uncomfortable with it. There is a need for somebody to help. They are interested in it, but they don’t have the expertise. They have not been raised up through the computer world, and I mean, you know, they came along when there were still manual typewriters. And so those people are not comfortable. There is a need there, they are interested in it, certainly they want to get the visibility, they don’t know how to go about doing it.”

The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding Facebook:

- A participant offered advice concerning the importance of using Facebook as a marketing tool and said, “I look at the Facebook thing as a way of hitting the younger generation, you know? Anybody over 40, I mean, Facebook to me is another forum for business. You know, but it’s a good media if you’re in business, you know, I mean it just is.”
- A participant who stumbled upon sales through a post on Facebook cheerfully said, “I did something, this is kind of crazy, on Facebook this year because I haven’t gotten into the whole thing yet, but our first berries were huge, huge. So, I put one on my finger and took a picture beside my ring and it was so much bigger than my ring. And I put it on Facebook, and I mean, the sales started coming in. I was like, ‘Whoa, this is amazing.’ You know? But, I started getting lots of contact and then I started sending out emails after that based on the people that. . . I just did that one thing, you know, with Facebook.”
- Another participant added, “Like he said, you get a comment. That comment generates people.”
- A participant discussed using Facebook as a way to be advertised on multiple pages said, “Well, what I’ve done is I’ve leveraged it because the places I sell product to, they’re on Facebook. So, they put me and my stuff on their page and all their thousands of communications or connections and you that helps me be connected one level away.”
- A participant discussed using Facebook more so to update customers about new crops to be offered at upcoming farmer’s markets said, “We use a lot of Facebook. Every time we go to market, we post what we are going to have. If we know what other people have, we will post that, too.”
- A participant who saw no use for Facebook said, “I do Facebook, and I get no sales off Facebook.”
- A participant agreed but said, “Of course, I don’t try to get sales off of Facebook, but . . . I update it almost weekly. And you get a lot of comments, but as far as somebody saying, ‘Hey, I want to buy it,’ I haven’t.”
- An extension agent shared how farms have garnered customers as a result of posts on Facebook. This participant

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said, “I would say that there is a . . . going back to like Facebook, there are several farms that do log daily, and I mean, especially the farms that are small farms where probably younger farmers are going in and selling a specialty or niche market that they developed. You see it all the time, and you see postings all the time of what they are doing. Eat Wild, again, I mean, I have heard some statistics, but I am not sure. And I would say, at least in our area, the most successful small farmer marketers, they use email all the time. That is something that they use. One of them recently said . . . his sales were about \$300,000 last year, so, I said, ‘You are not a small farmer anymore.’ (laughter) He didn’t really like that. They do not have a lot of time on their hands, and when they develop a big clientele of people, they have a lot of people coming to them. They get orders online and . . . I mean, it is amazing what some of these people are already doing.”

Problems Faced

Participants were asked to describe the frustrations and problems associated with marketing and selling their products, as well as issues faced within the agriculture industry as a whole. Below is a summary of the problems most commonly discussed by the participants:

Hindered by Regulations

Regulations such as those implemented for food safety and the Cottage Law were mentioned as detriments to successful business. Participants mentioned the difficulty they faced when trying to make it as a small farmer with so many government regulations implemented. Additionally, potentially false labeling of organic and natural products, as well as resellers at farmer’s markets were labeled as great concerns and caused tension from actual producers. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed the problems with strict rules and regulations by the government and said, “So, how they interpret the regulations and the processing, it is a major issue in marketing.”
- Echoing what the first participant said, another participant added, “Yeah, we find the laws to be highly prohibitive to being successful in Florida.”
- Providing specifics about her production, one participant said of the Cottage Law, “The issue with state and local markets is still regulation. You have to be permitted. If you want to sell your eggs, you have to have a big cleaning facility, a commercial kitchen. If you want to sell jams and jellies, according to the Cottage Food Law, you’re supposed to sell pretty much off the farm.”

Produce Vendors

In two of the focus groups, a great deal of discussion centered on the frustrations of vendors at farmer’s markets who sell recently purchased products unbeknownst to consumers. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who felt vendors should not be allowed at farmers markets said, “We are about half and half between produce vendors and farmers, but I personally think that is something that needs to be taken into account statewide is produce vendors at farmer’s markets. Farmer’s markets should be reserved for farmers.”

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- A participant who strongly agreed said, “And I think collectively the farmers need to stand up and scream about having all these produce vendors there. Because I see it throughout the state at different markets. Ours is being run by a produce vendor now.”
- Another participant added, “It is not a level playing field, is what it is. Because they can buy wholesale someplace, you know, off the train or whatever.”
- On the other hand, one participant saw the value of vendors at farmer’s markets. This participant said, “Yeah, but you know what? At the farmer’s market, there is a big balance there. To draw a lot of people, you need a lot of vendors. And if you are like any other . . . like where we are, we have four farmers in our area, five farmers, that is it. So, if there were only five farmers at the farmer’s market, you wouldn’t have a crowd. So, they let a produce company in, and they let bakers in, they let a lot of different people in.”
- One participant mediated the discussion by stating a major problem with vendors selling at farmer’s markets. This participant discussed the fate of the customer and said, “But then all of a sudden, there is more of them than there are of you. And the people, unfortunately, are not educated enough to know. They walk in, ‘Oh, I am at a farmer’s market, it has got to be fresh, local produce.’ Well, gee, last week I don’t know exactly where you were growing a head of cabbage in the state of Florida, let alone the South. You know? But, they have got it there.”

Logistics

Participants discussed the location of their farms in relation to the population of consumers as a problem in rural areas. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant mentioned the location of their farm being what they considered the largest hindrance to sales and said, ‘The biggest thing that we ran into was logistics. And logistics alone is almost shutting us down before we even get going.’
- Another participant discussed the same problem as a result of living in a rural area. In a disappointing tone the participant said, “And that’s our biggest concern is . . . you know, the niche market is there, but I live in Jackson County and as you know, we’re in the middle of nowhere. (laughter) And that’s, that’s where our marketing . . . we have some ups and downs, it’s never gonna be a complete perfect circle, it’s gonna be an oval or an egg, but trying to get it better.”

Pricing

Some participants discussed the problem with restaurants and consumers not being willing to pay higher prices for quality food. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who experienced restaurants committing to purchasing products and then backing out due to prices said, “If you have restaurants that are willing to do it. We have got a few very local restaurants, the next county out of Leon County, which is Tallahassee. And the local restaurants are like, ‘Oh, yeah, we want it, we want it, we want it.’ Until it comes to price, and then they go right back to the cheap crap that they order.”
- A participant who understood the problem with customers not being willing to pay the set prices contributed to the conversation and said, “Our biggest problem is the price that we charge. Normal-everyday-going-to-the-IGA people cannot afford to buy our products and you can’t . . . we can’t bring them lower because it’s what we have

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involved in our animals. And also they're naturally grown; we don't have chemicals. So, we have to spend extra money even on top of that keeping them, you know, healthy and viable."

Future Aspirations

Participants were asked to describe where they would like to see their business go in future years and what they would like to achieve. Below is a synopsis of their responses:

Online Grocery Store

Some participants stated interest in selling their products online and on their own websites. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant with ideas to offer customers all of their grocery shopping online said, "What I was talking about was being a full online grocery store . . . and they do exist."
- Another participant with experience in online sales shared, "With the online market, it has to be top quality, that's what we learned. And it makes sense, you're the eyes and the . . . you are the shopping for them, as the farm selling online. And so, we've had people that didn't really think about it that way and brought things that were not of the quality that we thought were . . . what had been advertised, and so there's some education there with working with farmers and figuring out expectations. And because at an open-air market, if something doesn't look good, then they're just not gonna buy it. You're not gonna have the kind of feedback you get with the online market if something shows up and it's poor quality."

Plans

In regard to the previous question about future business aspirations, participants were asked to share how they foresaw getting their business to the level of accomplishing said aspirations. Below is a synopsis of their responses:

Niche

One participant stated the importance of being unique. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed future plans to stand out and have a lasting business in the industry. This participant said, "And I have figured out that that has got to be my niche is to grow what they can't grow."
- An extension agent discussed farmers taking advantage of niche markets as well. This participant said, "I have some greenhouse guys that are doing some pretty good Facebook marketing right now. Only a small percentage of them are bold enough and brave enough to try it. And they basically take the niche market things."

Change With the Times

Some participants stated the value of being willing to change with what is popular now versus what perhaps was the case in years past. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed her many years as a veteran farmer and offered advice to anyone coming into the profession. She mentioned what she had learned throughout the years and said, "When I was coming up, the big thing was . . . OK, be sustainable, you need to sell direct. You get your best price selling direct. Whether it is the backdoor of the restaurant or to the people at the farmer's market or a CSA, it is all direct. Not have to go through the proverbial middleman. The second thing you do is value added, put it in the jar and in my case, we put it in

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the bottle. So, that gives us a year-round product when we have got a six-week window with our fresh fruit. But I sell wine all year round. So, those were the two key points. But, then you know, starting out, I tried it all. I have been doing it probably longer than most people at the table and I probably look weary for it. But I have had to change, you know. You don't do the same thing 24 years, every year. You change. You meet the challenge, and you do something different before somebody else gets it or . . . and then you have to change again because everybody else sees a good idea and has jumped on it.”

Community Garden

Plans to develop a community garden were discussed as a future aspiration by one participant as a means to promote his products as well as get a larger supply of his product out to his consumers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- “I wanted to do a segment where we did community gardens where people can come, we have harvest parties, sometimes we could have harvest parties, but then there is other things growing.”

Methods of Selling

Participants were next asked to share how they currently sell their products. The following is a synopsis of their answers. The methods of selling products ranged a great deal, from farmer's markets to personal deliveries and everything in-between. A few participants used a distributor to market their products and one producer was only willing to sell within a specific mile radius of his farm. Depending on the targeted audience, whether they are restaurant chefs or just an average consumer seeking local food, the selling methods of the participants were tailored to the needs of the customer while remaining beneficial to the producer. Many participants were members of CSAs and some of Red Hills Alliance, while others offered U-pick programs and online shopping. Very few participants used distributors outside of their personal business.

U-pick

Participants described providing a U-pick service to consumers with mixed feelings. Some participants found U-pick to be difficult, requiring a constant presence at the farm, as well as highly liable, while others described U-pick as beneficial, providing the small-scale, friendly farmer appeal desired by many customers. Most participants providing a U-pick were also selling their products via additional routes such as online distribution. Many participants stated their selling strategy to not simply be based on one, particular avenue but a combination of many such as online selling, U-pick and personal delivery. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant mentioned the value of being diverse; not only in what one grows but also in how one markets and sells products. This participant said, “So, you know, you keep rolling with the times, and right now it's direct marketing and value added. And selling more to local stores and also direct, U-pick.”

Online Sales

Due to participants' perception for the need for an online presence, many participants found selling online to also be appealing through the use an online order form and payment by check or credit card. In some instances, pre-orders provided producers with the convenience of knowing how much to produce and avoiding excessive waste. Both the Organic Online Market and Red Hills Online Market were referenced as examples where participants have taken part in online sales. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A participant with experience in marketing products online discussed the advantages and opportunities available to farmers. She said, “And the cool thing about the online market is we have so much data that you don’t get at a physical market. If we wanted to do something with that data, which we really haven’t done yet, we could. I mean, we could figure out the demographics as far as like location. Where are all these people coming from?”

Farmer’s Market

More than half of the participants were currently involved or had previously been associated with farmer’s markets. Some participants stated that they got their business started by selling at farmer’s markets and have since moved to different strategies, while others continued to solely market and sell their products through that particular venue. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme.

- A participant with years of experience in farming offered advice as to how a farmer’s market can support a small-scale operation. She said, “But generally the market, if you plan properly, so that everything doesn’t come in at once . . . if you stagger it a little bit, then a weekly market can absorb the lion’s share of what you produce. A lot of people do more than one market; there are some midweek markets that would help too. I am able to stagger it so that there is not much that goes to waste. And of course we consume a lot ourselves, too.”

Pre-orders

Some participants stated that by selling their products before growing them, they avoid excess costs and waste. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who avoids growing in excess by having customers pre-order said of the system, “Well, it is like what I do in the summer with my . . . mainly fruit, tropical fruit that we have, is in the summertime . . . is that we take the orders ahead of time and we harvest to order. Yeah, shipping is like the same or twice the cost of the actual fruit, so yeah. It’s hard. So, we do . . . it is all harvested to order. But, because I have got those orders ahead of time and they are paid for, I know that I am not going to waste . . . I harvest what I need.”
- Another participant mentioned that their farm grows products only after they have been ordered. This participant said, “I grow to order, I have a sprout business, but I will not grow them and throw them away. I grow them when people order them, and they get them fresh, optimally harvested at the right time, certified organic micro-green that I can charge a viable price for . . . for me to grow it. I just quit doing the stuff that I can’t market.”
- A participant discussed how to deal with the restaurant industry and shared, “Because we sell to chefs, we email out to our chefs twice a week, an order form. And we use Infusionsoft, which I don’t really like that program, but it is the only program I could find that is an actual order form. And so, it is just an order form that they just say, deliver this, deliver that. So, they order it on a Monday . . . they are supposed to order on a Sunday night or early Monday morning and then we deliver it on Tuesday. And so, we try to get them all to place orders on a regular basis.”

CSA Members and Red Hills Farm Alliance

A significant amount of participants were members or had some relationship with a CSA and/or Red Hills Farm Alliance. In addition, a great number of participants were either currently using or at one time in the past had used LocalHarvest, with a few mentioning EatWild as well. Many participants mentioned the enjoyment of camaraderie among members and the ability to provide a quality product to consumers. The following quote is an example of discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A participant responded by stating how he joined forces with other farmers to provide larger quantities to his customers. This participant said, “Well, I am working with, not just my farm, but a coalition of farmers. So, there are like four of us that have combined together and growing different things and trying to stagger it as such. And being able to provide, on a larger scale, what we need to . . . from the small farmer to the next level, only because we combined our forces together.”

Florida MarketMaker Initial Discussion

Next, and prior to actually showing the website, the participants were asked about Florida MarketMaker. Positive perceptions about Florida MarketMaker included its lack of advertisements and classes made available in counties. Negative perceptions about the overall concept of Florida MarketMaker are that the site is simply an attempt to reinvent the wheel and that other sites such as LocalHarvest are already well known and operating successfully. For those aware of the service and currently signed up, there were complaints about its effectiveness and how the site has not impacted business growth. For approximately half of the participants, the existence of the site was unknown and for others, the purpose was not clear. Many complained of the user interface and layout of the website, stating that it was too crowded and covered too many audiences as well as areas of industry. A common perception among participants was that Florida MarketMaker is not for the small farmer and instead is corporate and academic, perhaps associated with the government. Below is a synopsis of the discussion:

Positive

Good Idea

While some agreed that Florida MarketMaker sounds like a good idea with true intentions, many were skeptical of its purpose and effectiveness. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who saw value in Florida MarketMaker shared, “I would say, that it is a great idea. But, for our farm in particular, it doesn’t seem to apply as much . . . in it’s current form.”
- Another participant who discussed taking all he could get with free marketing said, “Anything can help. That is what I think.”
- A participant who applauded Florida MarketMaker for its efforts said, “There isn’t a lot of education, if you were to ask any of our CSA members, or farmer’s market customers, ‘What do you think of . . . or have you heard of Florida MarketMaker?’ They have never heard of it. I understand that there are some more developed MarketMaker models in other states, and I commend the effort of the MarketMaker program in Florida.”
- A participant who seemed confused as to why Florida MarketMaker was not advertised in many ways said, “I ask customers constantly when they come in, ‘Tell me where you found out about us from, MarketMaker or who?’ And MarketMaker is the new one on the block. And I thought, well, with the state backing it, it is something that we could really use. Nobody knows that it exists. I mean, I will actually sit there and take a sheet and brought it up on the computer with a website on it and give it to customers as they come in and say, ‘Hey, go looking for this.’”
- An extension agent reiterated the thoughts of the other participants and shared the opportunities that could potentially become available through Florida MarketMaker. This participant said, “Well, once you get used to it, it is user friendly. But, it takes a little bit of time and a little bit of effort. And you need to play around with it. It isn’t

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something that you are just going to go right in there and pick it up. But, there is some pretty interesting stuff in there, I must say.”

- Another extension agent shared how opportunities exist for future generations of farmers. This participant said, “One of our challenges has been that a huge segment of the folks that are small growers/direct marketers don’t have either Internet access or Internet skills. And again, I have talked to some folks that I am just convinced are never going to adopt those skills, but they do have sequential generations that can work with it. And I think that a piece of that is that it is a great opportunity to go across generations and get the production skills and wisdom from these older folks and get the input from the young folks.”

Workshops Offered

Additional positive feedback associated with Florida MarketMaker was the workshops offered in different counties to assist producers in the setup of profiles. This was considered to be both beneficial and considerate to participants. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who found value in classes on how to set up a profile on Florida MarketMaker said, “They actually provide workshops where you can go in there and sit down, and they have their laptops set up in there, and they will actually walk you through the process on how to set your own little website up.”

No Advertisements

Participants in a few of the focus groups mentioned how nice it was that the Florida MarketMaker website was not overwhelmed with advertisements, hence making it more attractive to those individual participants. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant with knowledge about Florida MarketMaker was pleased with the site for not including a lot of advertisements as compared to other similar sites. This participant said, “LocalHarvest is more geared to . . . when you go on LocalHarvest, half of your page is paid advertisements on the borders and around the edges. With these others, many of them, you don’t run into that.”

Negative

Unaware of Existence

Prior to the focus groups the participants aware of Florida MarketMaker stated hearing about the service through the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), extension agents, at conferences such as the Small Farms Conference and by word of mouth. However, participants stated that they did not know the website existed. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- An older participant discussed his lack of awareness of Florida MarketMaker and said, “And this is gonna sound real stupid, but I’ve been doing this a long time, and I didn’t even know about this one.”
- Another participant stated his opinion of the website in a clear manner when he said, “It is as though they put the program together and they are keeping it a secret, you know?”

Furthermore, it was oftentimes mentioned in discussion that the public is just as oblivious to the existence of the service.

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- One participant echoes this thought when he said, “But talking about the general public, the general public is completely unaware that it exists.”
- Another participant added, “And not only that, but it’s not being advertised. The consumer doesn’t even know this is out there. More people know about LocalHarvest than . . . nobody has ever heard of this.”
- A participant who felt there is really little to no need for the service if it is not being advertised said, “But talking about the general public, the general public is completely unaware that it exists. So, unless they call me and ask me, ‘Well, where can we get to your website, how can we get to your website to find out about your farm?’ You are already there, I just give you my website information. So, there is no reason for them to go to it.”
- An extension agent echoed the same thoughts about the lack of awareness of Florida MarketMaker from both producers and consumers. This participant said, “On the MarketMaker, one of the problems that I find with MarketMaker is that a lot of the producers and a lot of the individuals out there don’t know that it exists. You turn on the television today and one of the commercials you are going to see over the next 30 minutes, you are going to see an Angie’s List. And that is basically what MarketMaker is; it is an Angie’s List for produce or whatever else we are producing. It is not recognized for it. We are just not known out there. MarketMaker is just not there. The only places that I have ever been associated with it are in some of the different tradeshow or some of the different things we have done. That is a very, very limited amount of folks that have been exposed to it. If you are going to make MarketMaker really have an impact, you have got to reach out there to find people that are going to use it. You have got to have a reason for them to go use it.”

Unclear/ Difficult to Understand

Almost complete consensus was found among the participants in regard to the lack of understanding of Florida MarketMaker. Participants stated that the site’s purpose and services were unclear and difficult to use with ease. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who tried to register his business but experienced problems shared what happened when he said, “I really struggled to find the utility for it even though . . . like our avocados are mainly wholesale, for example. I don’t know. I just can’t make it work. I can’t get my hands around it.”
- An older participant discussed the difference between working a website as an older person compared to a younger person. He said, “That makes . . . the way that we run a computer . . . I run a computer as an old guy, is a lot different than you run a computer, as somebody else runs a computer, you know? We didn’t grow up with computers, so we are looking for the easy way to do things. And you all have clicked 50 buttons by the time we figure out where we are going. So, I think a lot of it would be what demographic you are marketing the whole thing.”
- A participant confused about the purpose of Florida MarketMaker said in an uneasy manner, “It is personal marketing. I think it is personal marketing.”
- One participant simply stated, “It is amazing to me that they have made it this difficult.”

Unsure of Its Purpose/ Lack of Clear, Defined Purpose

Participants stressed how they were not aware of the purpose of Florida MarketMaker and how they could use the service for their businesses. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A participant discussed her experience of browsing the website and said, “I quickly traversed it last night for the first time. I have no idea how I stumbled on it, but I really couldn’t figure out what it was for.”
- A frustrated participant said, “And the way it was described to me was that it would be a way to bring buyers and sellers together. And if you sign up, you will have people knocking at your door, all these buyers, people looking for product. So, I signed up, and it wasn’t worth the few minutes that it took me to sign up and so, you know, I can tell you everything I don’t like about it.”

Just as Florida MarketMaker was criticized for not serving a specific purpose, the tool was also criticized by participants because it did not have a clear, defined purpose. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed how Florida MarketMaker tries to accomplish too many things at once. This participant said, “I think this is trying to be too many things to too many people, it is just not specific enough.”
- A participant said a similar notion when they stated the website is, “Trying to be all things to all people and it’s just too much”
- Another participant firmly stated their opinion about the effectiveness of Florida MarketMaker. This participant said, “It definitely doesn’t target the general public.”

Ultimately the feeling among participants was that this attribute, among many others of Florida MarketMaker led to a lack of participation in the tool.

- One participant said about the difficulty of use of the site, “Because people . . . if the site is not easy and fast, they just move on to something else.”

In addition to being confused, the lack of clarity offered by the website led to frustration.

- One participant added, “No, I cannot imagine a consumer readily sitting down and quickly going through this and feeling good about anything.”

Corporate/ Not for the Small Farmer

Frequent comments were made by participants concerning the appearance of Florida MarketMaker and how it did not seem to be set up for the small, local farmer and instead was corporate, academic and business-like. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who was unsure of the target audience of Florida MarketMaker said, “Yeah, I can’t tell who the target is here. It certainly doesn’t look to me like it targeting individual buyers. It may be commercial buyers, but not . . . anyway, it doesn’t look to me like it is aimed at a person who wants to find blueberries.”
- One participant who felt Florida MarketMaker was out of their league said, “It would be more appropriate for people dealing with a lot more volume than most of us.”
- One participant was sure the website was for large corporation use when he said, “Well, if you look at it closely . . . and the more time you spend in there, you will see that it is developed more towards your Walmarts and

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everything. It was developed, if I am not mistaken, wasn't it developed at the University of Illinois and then we eventually picked it up?"

- One extension agent discussed the possible feelings of small farmers and why they may not use Florida MarketMaker. This participant said, "It is pretty advanced, it is pretty advanced for the rank-and-file small farmer, perhaps. I think that to some degree they do have the ceiling limitation that they have X amount of product and if they are already moving that, they may not have a perception that MarketMaker really fits for them. So, it maybe isn't the smallest of the small, it is sort of that small to midsize group that really would be the best targeted ones. The ones that are just taking a little bit of stuff and selling a hundred dollars at the farmer's market on Saturday, you know, maybe not."
- Another participant shared, "It just seems like it is totally geared for business. In my opinion."

Participants stated that LocalHarvest had a small-farmer feel having been created by farmers themselves and that Florida MarketMaker did not have the same feeling.

- A participant said in a simple manner, "[Florida MarketMaker's] too sophisticated for me."

Reinventing the Wheel/ Successful Alternatives Exist

A common theme mentioned by participants in almost every focus group was the criticism that Florida MarketMaker was attempting to "reinvent the wheel" on an idea or tool that already exists and successfully brings a clientele to producers, such as LocalHarvest. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant was skeptical of the purpose of Florida MarketMaker and said, "So, this marketplace kind of . . . it almost seems like everybody and his brother is trying to reinvent the same wheel, and there is just too much of it."

Lack of Effectiveness on Business Growth

Another common complaint for participants concerning Florida MarketMaker was its lack of impact on specialty crop producers who had signed up in the past or those who considered signing up for the service. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant, unsure as to why their farm should be registered on Florida MarketMaker, asked, "I am not clear on how this would help my business, how this would bring customers to me, you know? I mean, it doesn't seem to be too terribly hard to register. And as an academic exercise, it looks kind of interesting, but I don't see really how it would bring customers, you know?"
- When asked about Florida MarketMaker's impact on the growth of her business, one participant said sternly, "It doesn't. There is no impact."

Several other participants mentioned that they would participate in any free marketing program, but others questioned why they would sign up if they felt Florida MarketMaker would not provide them with any results.

Academic

A common theme among participants, particular when compared to other websites such as EatWild and LocalHarvest, was that the site was too academic, reminding them of the government, instead of representative of farmers and local agriculture. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

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- One participant told the rest of the group, “This is a government program.”
- Another participant asked, “Kind of like an IFAS-type project, isn’t it?”
- One participant inquired, “Is there a charge for it, the service?”

No Place for Specialty Products

Some participants felt as though the site was not open to specialty crop producers and was only good for mass-production farmers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One specialty crop participant saw no place for his business on the Florida MarketMaker website. He said, “Because my market would particularly be a posh market, that I am more or less, wanting to get into. It is specialty.”

User Interface and Website Layout

The layout of the website was also heavily criticized with almost unanimous opinions that the site was too crowded and unclear. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant offered insight into how people view websites and said, “How long . . . the average person isn’t going to spend long enough to try to figure out how a complicated website works; they are just going to move on.”
- Another participant added, “Right, they will move on past it.”
- One participant stated, “But this is like throw-up in a way, it is all just...all there.”

Attracts Wrong Type of Customers

Throughout the discussion, a few participants stated that, although they had received some interested customers as a result of Florida MarketMaker, the customers were not from an area of close proximity or were looking for products the producers did not have available or grow at all. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who was not interested in attracting customers outside of the community said, “I use LocalHarvest . . . I use it a lot, I like it. I get calls and emails; more emails than calls of course, from South Florida, a lot. And I think maybe those come through MarketMaker, I don’t know where they’re coming from but . . . and they are, ‘Oh well, we would like to buy your product for our restaurant, we’re looking for.’ Well, if I can sell everything that I grow to my community, at a good price, I’m not looking to sell in Orlando or Miami.”
- A participant who had registered in the past shared about the experience with Florida MarketMaker. This participant said, “It has been several years since I signed on it, and like I said, LocalHarvest, I get hits all the time. I have never heard from an individual, there were a couple of wholesale inquiries that I got through this. But, I never heard from the kind of customers that we target.”

Farm Not Open to Public

A few participants expressed issues with having to share their home address when they do not sell products directly from the farm. This created a privacy issue for such farmers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

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- A participant who did not create a profile due to a privacy issue shared, “One of the things that I have a problem with is that our farm is not normally open to the public, so we do not publish our street address, we publish our mailing address. There is no way to do that. You have one address, and it wants your street address, and it won’t put anything else, and I have a real problem with that.”

Aware of Florida MarketMaker

Participants who were aware of Florida MarketMaker prior to the discussion were asked to share what they knew about the tool. Throughout each of the focus groups, usually at least one participant had heard about Florida MarketMaker.

Currently Signed Up with Florida MarketMaker

Participants were then asked if they actually had an account on Florida MarketMaker and, if so, to discuss it. Less than 50 percent were ever signed up for the service and even fewer actively used the site. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme when asked how Florida MarketMaker has impacted their businesses:

- A participant who was frustrated with the website said of its impact on her business, “It doesn’t; there is no impact. So, we are registered . . . I should amend my statement. It has no known impact. So, we are registered, no one has ever contacted us from it to . . . no one has ever contacted us from it and stated that they found us through it.”
- Another participant responded when asked if she was registered, “I am, I mean I was, as far as I recall. Haven’t been back.”
- One participant said, “I think we started to sign up for it but never had the time to finish signing up.”

How Farmers Heard About Florida MarketMaker

Participants who mentioned they had previous knowledge of Florida MarketMaker were asked how they heard about the tool and from whom. Below is a summary of the discussion:

- One participant said, “I think I got an email from IFAS, originally, on it.”
- Another said, “Small Farms Conference.”
- One participant added, “We were at the conference here when we had heard about it, and it turned out that our extension office actually put our farm on for us.”
- Another shared, “I heard about it at the Master Sheep and Goat Program.”

Business Received as a Result of Florida MarketMaker Account

Participants were asked if their business or sales were affected in any way due to their account on Florida MarketMaker. Below is a synopsis of the discussion surrounding this question:

- One participant made it clear to the group that, “Now, I have had people contact me.”

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- One participant shared with the group, “I had a guy that had a CSA up in St. Augustine. He was asking if I had a certain thing. Unfortunately, the one thing he was asking for, I didn’t grow.”

Suggestions

Prior to looking at the actual Florida MarketMaker website, participants provided suggestions to improve the tool. The following are the suggestions made by the participants in this subject matter.

Local Harvest

A number of comparisons were made to LocalHarvest throughout each of the focus groups. Participants suggested Florida MarketMaker look at and take points from the design and structure of LocalHarvest. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- When asked about LocalHarvest, an extension agent said, “It is the first place that consumers start when they want to seek out local food.”
- Another extension agent answered the same question with “It has a lot of farms listed on there. A lot of farms, for Florida, in particular.”
- An extension agent with knowledge of Internet searching stated how easy it is to come across LocalHarvest when searching for local food on the Internet. This participant said, “I was just saying when you Google search, and you type in ‘local’ or something like that, it is usually the first choice that comes up. That is why I clicked on it for the first time.”
- Another extension agent compared LocalHarvest to Florida MarketMaker when they said, “And it seems easier to get into than MarketMaker.”
- An extension agent commented and said, “Not nearly as complex.”
- A participant shared their opinion about online marketing and the use of websites when they said, “I find LocalHarvest, I think services . . . it provides the ability for us to do anything we want. Although I don’t use it other than to list ourselves. I am not actually using their marketplace. I am now using Amigo for the CSA, and they have the little web store site . . . because my web sales are minor compared to the CSA activity, I focused on that. But, if I was just looking to market for small farm stuff, I probably would have just gone ahead and gone with LocalHarvest.”
- Another participant stated, “And not that I am pushing LocalHarvest, per se. But, they are pretty successful.”
- A participant added, “They [LocalHarvest] are more attuned to our level, absolutely.”
- The feeling was reiterated when a participant said, “I get a lot of people telling me that, ‘I found you on LocalHarvest.’”
- A participant spoke of Florida MarketMaker when they said, “And MarketMaker is the new one on the block.”
- A participant shared his opinion of free advertising on a website when he said, “I mean, we deal with other ones like LocalHarvest and Small Farms and stuff like that. So, anytime you can increase your market space by doing a

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half hour worth of typing your information into a computer site to get more people who will look at what you are doing.”

- One participant said, “I would get a lot of information from there. They’ve got it set up and you could probably look how many thousands and thousands of hits they get, and that’s what it all comes down to . . . is it working and how many hits you are getting.”
- One participant who was satisfied with LocalHarvest said of the website, “LocalHarvest, I can just get in and out of it and do those things pretty quick, and we do get, if people go on the internet and type up looking for certain things we get . . . they find us on that, we’re one of the local farms they find. And, so that’s about the benefit of it for me as far as LocalHarvest is concerned. I . . . I’ve not had anybody say that they saw my name on Florida MarketMaker, but I’m not sure things are listed the same way.”
- An extension agent with hopes for Florida MarketMaker compared it to LocalHarvest based on the capabilities of the two websites. This participant said, “And MarketMaker is a great tool for them to discover things about their market, but if the consumer is not there, there is not the incentive for them to take the time to do it. They want someplace where someone is going to go search and call them to buy their product. If the consumer is not there, and it is with LocalHarvest.”
- Another extension agent added, “I think it depends, MarketMaker in comparison to LocalHarvest, LocalHarvest is simpler, and it seems to generally be positive anytime I ever hear people talk about it. But it is just a sort of a simple connection. What do I have? How do you reach me? And that is it.”

Make Sure People Know the Service is Free and Do Not Associate With the Government

A number of participants reiterated the fact that the website appears corporate and like it was produced by the government. Some asked if there was a charge for its services. It was stressed by participants that the website make clear the fact that the service is free of charge to both consumers and producers alike. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant unsure of the specifics of Florida MarketMaker said, “Whether it is free or not, I know for producers it is free, at least currently . . . but if it is free, stating that is free would be great. And maybe it could be fit into the tag line. ‘A free service for connecting willing markets,’ maybe that tagline is uniform across all the MarketMakers and you need to have a committee meeting about it, but the fact that it is free is important. Another thing is the agencies across the bottom. There is a balance between needing to give credit to the organizations that are involved and also not turn off the people who would potentially be involved. There are many people within the small farms producer and consumer movement who have an anti-government streak. And that might turn off folks from participating at all. It shouldn’t be invisible, but when you look at the size of those logos, as compared to the actual utilities on the page, they could be a little bit smaller.”

Change Wording

A number of participants had difficulty understanding the purpose of Florida MarketMaker and the functionality of the website, attributing some lack of clarity to the language used on the site. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant suggested this concerning the wording and language used on Florida MarketMaker. “Well, you know, you need to updatemarketing terms are so, so important and you know we have got three of them

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right here. We have got organic, which is huge, local, which is huge, and small farmers. Those three words are marketing tools right now, and they definitely need to be incorporated in here.”

Include a Wanted Section

It was suggested that a wanted section be included on the Florida MarketMaker website so consumers could list their needs and they could be paired with producers with the available products. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who wondered about the search possibilities on the website asked, “Is there a way to figure out who is looking for what on there? You know what I am saying? In other words, if you knew who in your market was looking for . . . whatever.”

Event Listing/ Email Correspondence From Florida MarketMaker

Participants discussed how LocalHarvest utilizes a calendar to let both producers and consumers know about events, both large and small, within the agricultural community. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed listing events online and said, “When we have an event, yeah, when you have an event and it’s listed on LocalHarvest, I’ve got it set up so that I can ask for events that are going on within a 50-mile range or 100-mile range, and those events will get emailed to me. And that’s how I learned about that, ‘farm to table’ thin. I guess I’ve never investigated. I don’t know if this market does that or not, but that’s how I see LocalHarvest almost weekly is because I get emails from them . . . ‘There is an event in your area’ or ‘Sorry, there is no event.’”

Develop a Facebook Page

Some participants valued the idea of social media and stressed that, in order to stay with the times and remain competitive in the industry, Florida MarketMaker needed to have a Facebook page to update recent news and promote sales and events. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant discussed the opportunities for Florida MarketMaker with social media when they said, “They have to get a Facebook page, the MarketMaker Facebook page.”

Provide an Evaluation of Customers as a Result of Florida MarketMaker

During the discussion the idea of evaluating the effectiveness of Florida MarketMaker on the producers who sign up for its services to let them know if the site is generating any business for the individual farmers. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant suggested Florida MarketMaker provide a way to show the effectiveness of the website to registered users. This participant said, “I think there needs to be some kind of impact or evaluation system to evaluate . . . is anybody getting any bang out of this? Is this you know, how many customers have reached you through MarketMaker? That would be the one evaluation question that.”

Questions About Florida MarketMaker

During the discussion about Florida MarketMaker, the following questions arose from interested participants concerning the service.

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How Does It Promote to the Consumer?

A number of participants were concerned as to how Florida MarketMaker could and would target consumers. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant asked about Florida MarketMaker with concerns to how it targets the consumer. This participant said, “How do they present themselves to the consumer?”
- Another participant asked the question, “I know that when you post something, it goes out to whomever else is got a posting on the website. But, do they have, like ads in Google? I mean, how do people, how does the general public?”

Does It Regulate Posts?

A number of participants expressed concern for what was allowed on posts on the site and whether or not there was any sense of credibility attributed to the site to ensure that false information about farms was not published. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant, concerned with false claims made online, asked, “If you publish something on there . . . is there a mediation, or is there a review committee that reads over what you have listed, to make sure you don’t have anything listed that you shouldn’t? Is there any way to validate that they’re making sure they’re selling it like they should be?”

Does The Business Spotlight Change?

Multiple participants asked questions regarding the business spotlight on Florida MarketMaker to understand its purpose in a more in-depth manner and to learn whether or not the site changed the business spotlighted on a regular basis. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who saw possibilities for promoting local agriculture through the Business Spotlight inquired, “The ‘Business Spotlight,’ do they change that all the time?”

Florida MarketMaker Detailed Discussion

In order to gather specific evidence as to why or why not participants were using Florida MarketMaker, each page on the Florida MarketMaker website was shown to each participant and discussion took place as a result. Emphasis was placed on participant likes and dislikes and suggestions were made for future improvement. Below is a synopsis of the discussion surrounding each of the individual pages:

Positive

Although a great amount of discussion always turned to the negative aspects of the Florida MarketMaker website, there were some advantages and attributes of the site participants found useful and beneficial. The following displays conversation surrounding each of the positive themes.

Citrus Represents Florida

The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who farmed citrus smiled and stated, “I like to see the citrus up at the top. I mean it tells you Florida, plus it’s a little more geared towards me. You know, you wouldn’t see that on a Wisconsin MarketMaker.”

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- Another participant added with a grin, “I don’t know, when I see pictures of produce, I feel happy about it.”
- Furthermore, a participant shared their opinion of the site and said, “Colorful.”

Would Be Interested in Finding Out More About Florida MarketMaker As a Result of the Homepage

One participant stated how the Florida MarketMaker website showed enough promise that they would be willing to look into what it offered. The following quote is an example of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who saw opportunities for his business on Florida MarketMaker stated, “I definitely would research it and figure out more about it. If it increased my marketplace, I would get on.”

Youth Would Be Ok With This

In discussion surrounding the complexity of the site, some participants mentioned that it was important to look at the different audiences that would be looking at the site, stating that young people raised with the Internet would most likely be able to understand and navigate the site. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who discussed different audiences and their possible takes to the Florida MarketMaker website shared her opinion when she said, “Sometimes we have to look at who the website is going to. If you are under 40, I think that the younger set . . . the kids, the people that have grown up with computers, don’t get as frustrated by a page like this.”
- A participant responded and said, “Yeah, my situation . . . the vast majority of my customers are between 22 and 35. But yet, there is nobody between 35 and 55. I mean, nobody.”
- The conversation was summarized by an older participant who said, “So, a 30-year-old is going to develop a marketing page differently than I would.”

Negative

Of all the participants who took part in each focus group, not one was completely satisfied with the usability of Florida MarketMaker. Below are excerpts from the discussion surrounding the main negative themes involving the site:

Lack of Clear, Defined Purpose and Target Audience

A number of participants stressed how they were unaware of the exact purpose of Florida MarketMaker as well as the site's intended target audience. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant who found the way MarketMaker appears to the viewer to be a problem and deterring factor to the website’s success said, “If somebody is going to this website . . . it appears as though you are trying to make it for everything, whether it be for a farmer or a retail outlet. And if that is the purpose, then you have succeeded. But, for individuals that are wanting to say, ‘Okay, I want to get some black-eyed peas, where can I find black-eyed peas at?’ . . . this ‘Farmers, Fisheries and Business’ needs to be the prominent thing on the page. Because if they are wanting, you have got to make it dummy proof. It has got to be simple. If it requires even correct spelling, you are in trouble. You have got to make it simple. And you have got to make it stand out, so that when they go to that page, that is the big thing that you are producing and setting up.”
- Another participant added, “Isn’t there a big dichotomy in the purpose. I mean, it just seems kind of strange.”

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Cluttered

Participants in each focus group unanimously stated that the website is too cluttered and is not easily navigable. The lack of white space and large amount of information on the homepage leaves views confused, not knowing where to go next. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- Discussing the layout and contents of the website, a participant said, “I think it’s way too busy.”
- Another participant stated, “It’s a very busy page.”
- Similarly, a participant shared, “It is all in the pan.”
- A participant asked in a statement, “That is why you are having this meeting, I presume.”
- Another participant chimed in and said, “It is too busy, even for the consumer.”
- Discussing the consumer again, a participant said, “It’s too busy, it’s not obvious where a consumer would go to look.”
- One participant said with a smirk, “I would have to put my glasses on, and I don’t know if it is worth it.”
- An extension agent said of the layout of the website, “It is overwhelming.”

Confusing/ No Thorough Directions

Attributed to the clutter of the website, participants stated that the site was confusing and lacking in any clear directions as to what a farmer or producer should do or what steps should be taken. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed the ease or lack thereof of the navigation of the website and said, “First impression is a little confusing.”
- Another participant presented a hypothetical scenario to the group and said, “If the goal is for someone to come on here because they want to find local shiitake mushrooms, I am lost.”

Corporate Feel? Does Not Appeal to the Small Farmer

Participants stated how the website appeared corporate and left out the smaller farmer. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed the corporate feel of the website and stated, “I think it does look more for a bigger grower, maybe . . . not even somebody as small as we are.”
- A participant who felt there was no place for specialty crops on the website said, “But, it doesn’t show some of our specialties.”
- One participant spoke of the feeling they got when they viewed the site. This participant said, “Warm and fuzzy doesn’t come to mind.”
- A participant added to the conversation and said, “It doesn’t look like I belong in that . . . I belong in there.”

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No Awareness

The majority of the participants stated that there is little to no awareness about Florida MarketMaker and that other, similar sites, such as LocalHarvest, are more well known. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant discussed the lack of awareness of the website and said, “The only reason we know about it is because we attend functions that are trying to promote it.”
- One extension agent simply stated, “You have to market the MarketMaker.”

Extension agents offered some advice on how Florida MarketMaker could potentially be marketed. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One extension agent discussed the need for repetition in order to successfully brand an item or a service. This participant said, “You got an article featuring it and here again, repetition. I mean, you can’t put it in one time and forget about it. But, if you have an article in every trade journal, if it is Cattlemen’s Magazine or the Florida Vegetable Grower or whatever else. There ought to be something about MarketMaker in every publication in the Southeast or the country or wherever.”
- Another extension agent offered practical advice on how to promote Florida MarketMaker. This participant said, “Maybe it needs to be in flyers or newspapers or something else. We need to find some other avenue to get out there to reach people. It is not something that is being done today.”

No Consumer Focus

Participants were frustrated and confused about the lack of consumer focus on the Florida MarketMaker website. Participants saw a need for both a producer and consumer focus but did not see where the website targeted the consumer. Furthermore, many participants wondered how consumers could be targeted if Florida MarketMaker was left in its current state. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who pondered the purpose and effectiveness of the site asked, “My big question would be is that, I mean, for the small farmer, if you are really wanting to interact with the public, how is this getting visibility to the public to the retail level?”
- A participant spoke in layman’s terms and asked, “How are they trying to get this into the public eye? And to our regional area . . . center of the state? How are they making this available to the actual consumer who is going to come to see me and buy my stuff?”
- Another participant echoed the thoughts of the other participants concerning consumer usage of the site. This participant said, “If the consumer went to this space, they wouldn’t know what to do. There is too many things going on.”
- One participant said this of consumers. “Consumers aren’t going to be needing to look or wanting to necessarily look at all this stuff. They want to know what there is.”
- A participant firmly stated, “There is no direction whatsoever for a consumer on this page.”

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- Another participant chimed in and stated, “It is complicated and it seems like, from a consumer perspective, it might be a bit of a hassle.”
- A participant voiced their opinion and stated, “That seems too, like, very problematic.”
- A participant with insight into marketing asked, “Like, how do you search for this farm? How do you . . . you know the average time a person spends on a page is really short, so you gotta grab them. And if you’re a farm wanting to come to this site to register, you’re gonna spend more time trying to figure out how to do that, than a customer probably looking for a farm.”
- An extension agent expressed similar concerns about the missed opportunity to attract the consumer. This participant asked, “We are still trying to get to the other side of it, it is the consumer on the other end of it. That is what they are putting their ads and stuff in MarketMaker for, is to get to the end product. Where are we getting to that end?”

Too Fancy/ Academic

A majority of the participants agreed that, in agriculture, especially small-scale agriculture, there is a need to appear down to earth and local. With that being said, participants stressed how corporate the website appeared and how it needed to look less academic and sterile. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- Simply stated, one participant said, “It’s too fancy.”
- One participant discussed the layout of the website and said, “This is way too busy. And like I say, you know, I look up there, and I see this thing come up, and it has all this pretty fruit and stuff up there, and I just figure it’s out of my league.”
- A participant who was not pleased with how the website appeared discussed their opinion with the group. This participant said, “It looks like it was very academically done. It looks like somebody in the School of Business at UF did it.”
- Another participant shared advice and said, “For the public, it needs to look homey.”
- A participant shared their experience with the website and said, “See, and when I see all that grapefruit or all these tomatoes or all of these things, you’re talking ‘big farm’ to me.”
- A participant discussed academics and said, “But, but that’s the university, that’s what they do, see? And that’s the problem.”
- An extension agent reiterated the same opinions of the participants concerning the website and how it appears academic and government based. This participant said, “Looks very complicated. Looks associated a lot with the government which seems to turn a lot of small farmers away when they see it.”
- Another extension agent offered insight into the logos on the bottom of the website. This participant said, “I think the big thing on it, that probably takes away from the consumer wanting to look at it, you got the whole bottom tier of it so busy trying to give credit to everybody and their identity, when you are not really reaching your audience. I mean, I can see . . . well, there is USDA, and here is Farm Credit and here is UF, and here is Fresh from

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Florida, and so are we promoting the products or are we promoting these agencies? I mean, that is what we are promoting. Yeah, there needs to be somewhere in this thing . . . some minuscule thing, but your Red Hills deal jumps out at you and you say, ‘Well, hey, that is what I am interested in.’”

Suggestions

Just as participants shared their likes and dislikes of the Florida MarketMaker website, they also shared suggestions that would increase their usage of the site. Below are excerpts from the discussion surrounding the main suggestion themes:

Producer Page/ Consumer Page

In an almost unanimous decision, participants in every focus group stressed the importance of targeting producers and consumers individually on the website. It was stated that there is no need for one group to get caught up in impertinent information that is only desired by the other group. Hence, it was suggested multiple times that the site make it available for viewers to state their identity on the homepage and be taken to different pages as a result. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant with ideas on how to change the layout of Florida MarketMaker to increase its effectiveness shared them with the group and said, “One of the things that you sometimes see is identification for users. Like if you visit a university website, it might say . . . ‘Prospective Students,’ ‘Alumni,’ ‘Visitors.’ That kind of thing. So, maybe creating filters for different user groups.”
- A participant echoed the same ideas and said, “You have to take like what Burpee does with their online catalog. They ask you, ‘Are you a professional grower or are you a homeowner?’ And then you can click either way and that is essentially the separation between consumer and businesses.”
- A participant with the same opinion said, “And what I think is so . . . throwing everything on one page, there should be maybe a page, if you are a supplier or a farmer . . . go to this page. If you are wholesaler . . . go to this page; if you are a consumer . . . go to this page.”
- Similarly it was said by another participant, “So, right there, right on that top panel, you’ve got block number one is farmer, block number two is consumer.”
- Furthermore, another participant said, “It seems like there ought to be a farmer page or a consumer page, and it would simplify it. I think if you look at what the Red Hills Small Farm Alliance has done, it’s really simplified that, if you’re a farmer, that’s where you go. If you’re a producer . . . if you’re a buyer, this is where you go, and it’s very simple.”
- A participant shared why identifying the viewers of the website would be beneficial when they said, “Because those are two totally different populations. A farmer needs to log in to one site or view of the site, and a person who’s buying needs to have a different view.”
- Another participant shared the same opinion and said, “Yeah, maybe have two areas to . . . one for consumers and one for businesses, rather than trying to cram it all on one page.”
- One participant explained the concept in detail. This participant said, “Do you think it might be more helpful if you took what we are looking at here, eight various sections of this page and literally came up with a front page

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that doesn't have all this on it but actually leads you to a second page, or a third page, or a fourth page? You see something on here, you have to just list . . . like basically, 'What are you wanting to do?' 'Find a crop.' OK, click that. It takes you to a page, which has this on it, which blows it up and makes it simpler. That way, people that are looking for crop search is not going to be interested in going to the 'Buy and Sell Forum' where farmers would go to, to see about buying a tractor or a disc. It is going to unclutter it."

Develop and Include Purpose On Homepage

As previously mentioned, participants felt the site was lacking in a clear, defined purpose. As a result, it was suggested that a direct, succinct, and comprehensible purpose be made available on the Florida MarketMaker site, perhaps in an About Us page. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant expressed the importance of making a purpose evident on the homepage of the Florida MarketMaker website for viewers to read and understand. This participant said, "I think there should be a homepage that very simplistically says what this site is for, what this site is about. There has to be."
- One extension agent stressed the same need to include a purpose. This participant said, "Yeah, there is nothing here that clearly says, 'Here is where to find local stuff or buy local farm products.' And even their little statement at the top, 'Connecting willing markets and quality sources of food from farm and fisheries to fork in Florida.' I mean that is a little overboard. You need something more direct."

Remove National Presence

Amidst discussion surrounding specific pros and cons of the actual site, a number of participants stated how it was bothersome that the site provided information for national farms when they were looking at a state site in order to find local farms. It was stated that there could be links to a national site but that local, state agriculture should be the main focus of the site and in the search engine. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant frustrated with national information on the state site said, "This is the Florida MarketMaker, so I would prefer not to see national. I would prefer to see just for Florida."
- In regard to the state versus national information a participant asked, "Or is this national? Because if I click in there, now I'm looking at the whole world and I don't want to."
- A participant shared his opinion with the group and stated, "You know, if I'm coming into Florida MarketMaker, my first drill should be into what's in Florida, and then if I want to expand, I can expand."
- A participant reiterated the thoughts of previous participants and stated, "For the small producer, having a statewide directory is not helpful."
- An extension agent discussed the extensive amount of information available on the site and how it could be too much for some users. This participant suggested, "You make it two stages, where one is a simpler form and then if they want more details, they can go in and spread their market out."

Change Market Research

A great deal of participants stated how they were unsure of the purpose of the Market Research page for consumers as well as for producers who were already in operation. Although a participant noted that the statistical information could have

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been helpful when deciding where to start a farm, they shared that the information was not what they were looking for at present. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant unclear of the purpose of the page said, “I don’t understand what ‘Market Research’ is, I don’t know.”
- Another participant asked a similar question when they said, “And it says, ‘Market Research’ as one of the three boxes . . . what is the purpose of this? Is it to register? Is it to research? What is the research? Is there research out there? So, it is kind of confusing.”
- Another participant displayed their confusion with the Market Research page when they asked, “Who is the user for the ‘Market Research’? Is it market researchers?”
- A participant offered advice as to how the page should be presented. This participant said, “Put ‘Market Research’ under the ‘Farmers Profile’ in their section because I mean, the public doesn’t care I mean, what the market is. I mean, I mean, most farmers already went through that with their business plan.”
- Another participant discussed retrieving information from the Market Research page when they said, “This would not be my primary source for going to get information.”

Edit Layout

A great deal of layout changes were suggested by each the participants. Changes dealt with tabs, colors, pictures, graphics, etc. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant was frustrated with the complexity of the website. This participant said, “Yeah, I want to just be able to look and point. I don’t want to have to read through each of these to find out what they do.”
- Another participant reiterated the same thoughts when they said, “And just aesthetically, it’s hard to see what the priority is, I guess.”
- A participant discussed feeling like she was paying her bills when using the Florida MarketMaker website. She said, “And the layout thing, again, this bar at the top of the page makes me feel like I’m paying my bills, just the same kind of format.”
- Another participant compared the website to another similar site. She said, “Yeah, I came in here and seeing this, I feel like I’m somewhat jaded because I’ve seen what the Red Hills Alliance website looks like and how easy it is to work.”

Make Language More Simple

In an effort to appear less corporate, it was suggested by a number of participants that phrases and words be changed in order to be able to be more easily understood by all viewers of the Florida MarketMaker site. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- “I’m basically . . . I came up through the corporate world, but I’m basically a farmer at heart, and I want people to talk my language.”

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Add Organic Label

A number of participants, primarily those in the business of growing and selling organic products, expressed the desire for more options for organic growers on the website. It was suggested by said participants that a USDA Organic Label be included in the area where other labels were found near the bottom of the website. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant concerned with the lack of organic advertising and options on the website said, “I think I would add the ‘USDA Organic’ label in there, a line down here, too.”

Include Map for Areas

Often using the website LocalHarvest as a comparison and an example, some participants suggested Florida MarketMaker include a map for easy location searching for available products as is available to consumers on the LocalHarvest site. This would allow consumers to click on a region, decreasing their search as it got more specific instead of just typing in a zip code as is currently available on the Florida MarketMaker site. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- A participant who supported adding a map to the Florida MarketMaker website, as has been done by other websites targeting the same audiences, stated, “They aren’t gonna go to this site and go ‘Farmer/Rancher’ and do that. If you had a map and say, ‘Click on the area or the county,’ you know, how they have maps?”
- Another participant added, “It says nowhere on here to click on map to look at county, or click on map to drill down. So, this is like . . . I go here, and I don’t want to look at the whole state.”
- A participant shared how another website utilizes a map for locating local farms. This participant said, “And the way they [Florida Wines] have done that website is, you go to that and it has a map of Florida. Much like this, doing what [S2] is suggesting, it has all the farm wineries identified, and you click on any one of them if you are passing nearby and that website comes up.”
- A participant who was very pleased with the system used on LocalHarvest said, “I mean, LocalHarvest is way more intuitive because you just have a map and you like . . . I’m looking for stuff in this area, and you keep clicking down until you get to your really local, local area.”

The System Should Apply Original Specifics to the Entire Site

Some participants were frustrated that they had to select certain options in each new listing instead of having each of the following listings maintain specifics already made in earlier listings. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant offered ideas about the Florida MarketMaker system in response to another participant who said the tool should remember previous changes made to producer profiles and said, “On her note, what she is saying is that we are signed in, so that should recognize us . . . so, if I punch in on one group that I am organic, that should feed my information throughout the whole system that whatever I am doing is organic. But, what she is saying is that on each individual page that we have to fill out, we have to refill out all the same information before we get to . . .”

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- A participant provided a specific example of a problem with the site as it pertained to their farm and said, “OK, but you can’t assume, for example, that everything is organic because like I say, as an example our honey is not, so I would have to unclick it . . . it is okay if they give me a default if I can unclick it.”

Provide Information as to What Steps to Take After Registering on Florida MarketMaker

Participants, who had registered for Florida MarketMaker, prior to the focus groups, stated how the site provided little assistance once someone was registered. It was suggested that instructions for next steps and things to look forward to be provided for the individual who chooses to register. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant spoke about the need for follow up on the site once someone has registered. Various participants agreed when she said, “It might be interesting to have a completion page that has next steps for someone who has gone through the registration . . . aside from just saying, ‘Congratulations and welcome’ and all that . . . but that gives explicit next steps for maybe uploading more photos if they haven’t done that, or submitting events, if there is a place for that, which I don’t think there is. I know LocalHarvest has that. Whatever it is . . . maybe even a link that goes to Facebook that says, ‘Tell your Facebook people that you just registered for this.’ ‘Tweet about this.’ Because you know how sometimes if you buy something on Amazon, it will say, ‘I just bought this fabulous book, and I want to tell all my friends.’ So, that kind of thing could be easily incorporated.”

Overarching Themes

Several themes became apparent throughout the course of the focus groups. The overarching themes included the need to focus on local agriculture and the need for simplicity in communication and marketing.

Local and Fresh Angle

Throughout each of the focus groups participants discussed the value of local agriculture. A number of participants felt as though a current opportunity exists to promote local agriculture, as the demand for it seems to be increasing. The following quotes are examples of discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant spoke on where he felt the local movement was going and said, “It feels like it’s becoming more of a mainstream idea to buy local food in general.”
- Another participant responded and said, “Well, and I guess that’s why I was asking about a particular community because I get the impression that there’s an increasing number of people who value locally.”
- A participant talked about how local food is a unique demand. This participant said, “A lot of them, they are like . . . here you are delivering them fresh product every day or something like that, and they can’t get it anywhere else. They can’t get anything like that. So, you have a unique product, and you are in a unique position to be doing that, too.”

Need for Simplicity in Communication

In a society where people are constantly inundated with information from multiple sources, participants oftentimes discussed the value of clear, succinct information delivered in an understandable manner for all audiences. The following quote is an excerpt from discussion surrounding this theme:

- One participant said, “And it seems to me that a lot of stuff going on, on this page and if you just had a page where, you know . . . before this, that was much simpler where you could register or find a farmer and then go to,

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you know, be directed to the areas that you need to go to, specifically. I don't think a consumer would take the time to figure this out because most consumers aren't that sophisticated. I'm sorry, but they want it quickly."

Findings

After conducting six focus groups, five of which targeted small farmers in Florida, it was evident that a lack of overall awareness of Florida MarketMaker existed within the population. Ultimately there was a lack of awareness of Florida MarketMaker in each target group. It appears that a major challenge facing Florida MarketMaker is its lack of a defined purpose and target audience, as well as too broad of a reach. In an attempt to cover all bases, it did not resonate with any particular audience. Instead of "reinventing the wheel," participants suggested that Florida MarketMaker find a niche, define its target audience, and stand out as something unique and different.

Furthermore, a great amount of discussion focused on the aesthetics of the website and its lack of personal touch. As previously stated, the belief that the site was for large corporations and not for the small, local farmer was common and reiterated. A bottom-up approach to marketing instead of top-down approach was suggested to relate more to farmers and ranchers. This was suggested in an effort to avoid appearing academic and corporate.

- One participant stated his opinion of the major problem facing the Florida MarketMaker website. He said, "The problem with this is that it is top-down. We are bottoms-up people. And that is how we view the world."

Lastly, as touched on above, a major issue facing Florida MarketMaker is its lack of a clearly defined purpose. As far as the public represented in the focus groups is concerned, a clear purpose was not apparent to the participants and instead, the site seems an attempt to do something that has already seen success elsewhere in websites such as LocalHarvest or EatWild. The results of these focus groups provide a detailed look into the usage and lack of usage of Florida MarketMaker concerning the sale and distribution of local food. The summary below compiles the results.

Participants Current Marketing Strategies

- Participants promote their products a great deal via word-of-mouth by other farmers and past customers who share with people in their friend and business circles.
- Participants believe that by creating a personal relationship/connection with customers, a long-standing, loyal relationship will be created, unusual to some other business relationships.
- Participants agree that it is important to create a friendly environment that leaves customers feeling as though they are on the farm and purchasing from a local farmer. The buying environment is crucial to local business.
- Participants find value in maintaining frequent communication, via hand-sent mail or email, with customers to foster repeat business as well as maintain a local feel-type relationship.
- Participants already use or are considering using a website to better market their products.
- Participants agreed there is an opportunity to take advantage of agritourism in Florida.
- Participants agreed that it is beneficial to provide samples of products during farm tours or U-picks to provide consumers with a reason to pay premium prices for high-quality products.

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- Participants found that utilizing outside marketing techniques through involvement in CSAs and other co-ops, as well as through farmer's markets and involvement on websites such as LocalHarvest help to establish a small farmer in the industry as well as prove beneficial in helping farmers market their products and find buyers for their products.
- Participants agreed that farmer's markets are good ways to disseminate information to consumers as well as a good way to create a customer base for future mailings and list serves. Additionally, farmer's markets provide producers with the ability to offer samples of their products, increasing the likelihood of consumer purchasing.
- Participants agreed that it is important for a farm to find a unique marketing angle to attract customers, whether it be through offering organic products, products available all year or simply rare products that are in demand in specialty restaurants.
- Participants agreed that social media is increasingly becoming more and more popular, especially Facebook, and that it is beneficial for a farmer to maintain an online presence as well as be willing to change with the times.

Problems Faced When Marketing Local Food

- Participants find laws halting specific agricultural practices and strict regulations about processing procedures to be a main cause inhibiting the sale of local food.
- Participants dislike produce vendors selling at farmer's markets, often unbeknownst to consumers, occasionally at lower prices than actual farmers.
- Participants feel there is a major problem with false labeling, particularly involving the labeling of organic products, and as a result, true organic and natural growers get beat out as a result of these false claims.
- Logistics come into play when marketing local products as some farms are not adjacent to highly populated areas and sales oftentimes suffer as a result. This also affects farmer's abilities to travel to some farmer's markets at a low cost.
- Customers' unwillingness to pay premium prices for local food causes farmers to lose money or have products left over at the end of the season.
- Large, corporate stores have a negative affect on local farmers as some falsely advertise local food for a lower price than farmers have the luxury of setting.

Florida MarketMaker Overall Problems

- Participants were generally not aware of the existence of Florida MarketMaker.
- Of those aware of Florida MarketMaker, many had no continued use of the service due to confusion or lack of impact on the business and sales.
- Participants found the purpose of Florida MarketMaker to be unclear and the target audience to be unknown.
- Participants did not think Florida MarketMaker is suited for the small farmer but instead is set up to attract corporate farmers and big businesses.

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- Participants did not see where Florida MarketMaker targets the consumer or how that could be done.
- Participants strongly agreed that Florida MarketMaker is attempting to reinvent the wheel of websites, such as LocalHarvest and EatWild, that already successfully achieve the purpose of the website.
- Participants have continued to experience little to no business growth as a result of being registered on Florida MarketMaker.
- Participants felt that Florida MarketMaker was academic and more suited for a corporate farmer.

Florida MarketMaker Design Problems

- Participants agreed unanimously that the website is cluttered with too much information in one place.
- Participants found the website to be difficult to understand, especially from a consumer's standpoint.
- Participants agreed that the website should be divided into a producer side and a consumer side to queue viewers in the right direction.
- Participants thought the colors on the Florida MarketMaker website are not representative of local agriculture.
- Participants found the language used on the website to be too technical and not easy to follow.
- Participants agreed there is no need to include national information on the state website.
- Participants found little need for the market research section of the website to be as prominent as it is at present.
- Participants agreed that the website gives an overall feeling of corporate, big business instead of local, small-town agriculture.

Overarching Findings

- Avoid appearing corporate in all instances in agriculture.
- Participants agreed that personal relationships are what drive sales in agriculture.
- Participants agree value lies in being unique and providing unique products or common products in a unique manner to be beneficial in sustaining a business. Finding a niche is a major marketing tool.
- Participants stressed the importance of revamping the Florida MarketMaker website to appear more local and appeal to both the small producers and consumers.
- Small farmers are not marketing their products the way Florida MarketMaker is set up to assist them with sales and marketing.

Recommendations

After researching and analyzing results, the PIE Center has gathered a great deal of information concerning Florida MarketMaker on a broad basis as well as specifics about each section of the website. Below are specific recommendations

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on how to increase the effectiveness of the site. The recommendations are grouped into two categories: Overall Recommendations and Layout Recommendations. By describing each suggestion in detail, it is anticipated that Florida MarketMaker will undergo some or all of the changes to experience a more effective, efficient website for consumers.

General Recommendations

- Further research should be conducted to determine which of the most common marketing techniques are the most effective in bringing in the most sales of local food.
- A marketing campaign should be developed to promote Florida MarketMaker among the public with emphasis on the fact that changes were made to the website.

Overall Recommendations for Florida MarketMaker

Overall recommendations for Florida MarketMaker consist of those dealing with the entire marketing concept as a whole, as well as the steps suggested to increase the effectiveness of the site.

- A clear, defined purpose for Florida MarketMaker should be established. Instead of trying to “wear too many hats,” focus on one particular part of the industry or one service should be established.
- A specific target audience should be established and determined, or the website should be altered to be conducive to both producers and consumers of large and small operations.
- To avoid reinventing the wheel, Florida MarketMaker should offer something in demand by producers and consumers that is not already being offered by other websites.
- Creators, designers and operators of Florida MarketMaker should listen to the voices of participants who stated that they should look at successful websites such as LocalHarvest and EatWild for ideas and improvements.

Recommendations for Florida MarketMaker Design

Layout recommendations for Florida MarketMaker consist of those specifically associated with the visual presentation of the site itself such as font, wording and design. By adopting these layout changes, it is anticipated that the viewing experience of the Florida MarketMaker website will be more pleasurable for the consumer.

- First and foremost create a producer and consumer section of the Florida MarketMaker Website that segues each viewer to where they want to go in a simple and efficient manner. This would essentially divide the website into two parts, one for the producer and one for the consumer, as the information pertinent to each group differs along with the understanding of terms and the industry as a whole.
- Make clear the purpose of Florida MarketMaker on the website so viewers will be able to easily grasp what the site was created to do and how it functions as well as define the target audience. This could all be made available in an About Us page.
- Redesign the site to create a more presentable appearance and first opinion. Get rid of excess information creating clutter and make directions for getting registered clear, concise and easy to follow. Participants agreed unanimously that the website was cluttered and that too much information at once made them avoid the site altogether.

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- Remove the Market Research page altogether or, if not, do not make it a prominent part of the website as participants did not see a value in the information provided by it in the form of statistics. Many participants thought the information could have been helpful prior to becoming a farmer, perhaps in the beginning stages of developing a farm. However, the market research information seems to have little to no value for the consumer.
- Remove the national side of the site as participants said they found no relevance for the information about national agriculture. Participants stated that when they go on a state site for the purpose of local agriculture, they only want to find local agriculture.
- The colors and pictures used currently are not representative of small farmers or agriculture in general. Consider using more earth tones and pictures that do not look so academic. Participants suggested using pictures and graphics that actually represent the state.
- In an effort to appear more local and small "farmer-esque," participants suggested the wording be changed to create clear and direct sentences. For example, participants suggested rewording "Find a Business" and "Register Your Business" to "Find a Farm" and "Register Your Farm."
- Include a regularly updated calendar or upcoming events page that not only showcases large agricultural events such as annual meetings and tradeshow but also disperses information about individual farm sales, farm tours and farmer's markets.
- Include a map for simple searching as LocalHarvest does at present.
- Include a search bar for information throughout the Florida MarketMaker site. This would contribute to easier navigation throughout the site.

Appendix A: Florida MarketMaker PowerPoint Presentation

Florida MarketMaker

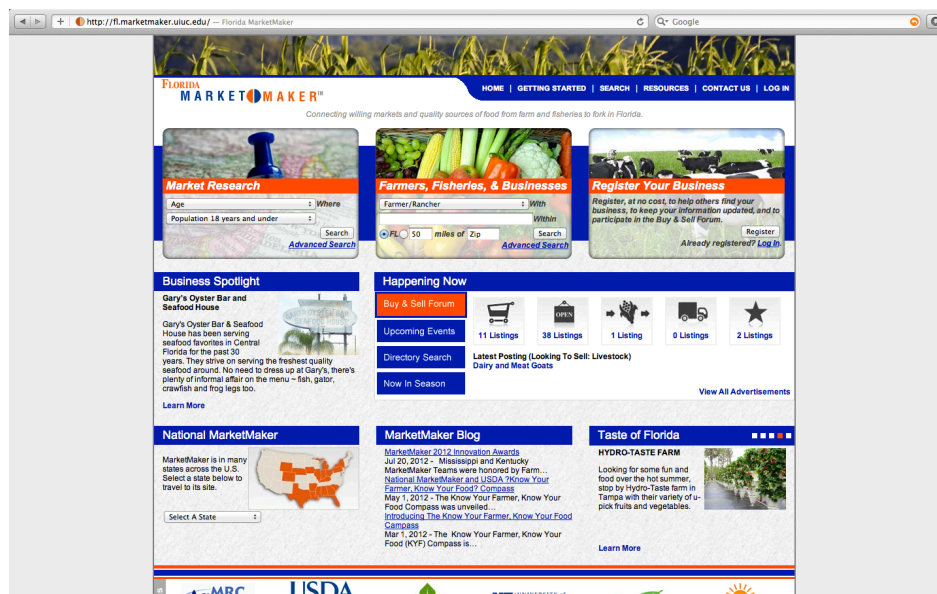
- Florida MarketMaker is an online marketing tool for farmers, fisheries and businesses within the state of Florida. Florida MarketMaker allows producers throughout the state to register their business on the site for potential customers to find and purchase food and fiber products within their area.

MarketMaker

- MarketMaker is a national partnership of land grant institutions and State Departments of Agriculture dedicated to the development of a comprehensive interactive database of food industry marketing and business data.

Florida MarketMaker

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The screenshot shows the Florida MarketMaker website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for HOME, GETTING STARTED, SEARCH, RESOURCES, CONTACT US, and LOG IN. Below this, there are tabs for Business Search, Market Research, Help, Business Results, and Census Profile. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a map of Florida with various cities labeled, and a 'Demography Variables and Map Legend' section with dropdown menus for Type (Age), Subtype (Population 18 years and under), State (Select New State), and Region (Florida). The right column displays a 'Census Profile' table comparing data for YR 2000 and YR 2010. The table includes categories such as Total Population, Population Density, Total Household, and breakdowns by Age, Household Type, and Race.

	YR 2000	YR 2010
Total Population	15,593,328	18,917,612
Population Density (per sq. mi.)	275	334
Total Household	6,341,121	7,448,581
By Age (Number of People)		
Population 18 years and under	3,836,121	4,019,724
Population 19 to 24 years	1,122,612	1,649,653
Population 25 to 34 years	2,063,668	2,305,256
Population 35 to 54 years	4,600,754	5,095,232
Population 55 to 69 years	2,284,276	3,345,517
Population 70 years and over	2,075,947	2,502,230
By Household Type (Number of Household)		
Total Family Households	4,238,409	4,882,567
Total married couple families	3,242,027	-
Total married couple fam. w/ chldm. < 18 yrs.	1,260,336	-
Total nonfamily households	416,338	-
Total One-Person Households	1,666,374	-
By Race (Number of People)		
White	12,463,302	14,115,506
Black	2,312,105	2,902,619
Asian	264,377	423,678
Native Hawaii and Pacific Islander	6,812	13,631
Other Race	472,333	812,803
2 or More Races	409,021	571,322

The screenshot shows the registration page of the Florida MarketMaker website. The page has a header with navigation links (HOME, GETTING STARTED, SEARCH, RESOURCES, CONTACT US, LOG IN) and a 'Login' section with fields for Username and Password, and a 'Register Your Business' section with a 'Register Your Business' button. Below these are links for 'Request Account Access' and 'Forgot Password?'. The footer contains logos for AgMRC, USDA, FARM CREDIT, UF, sustainable UF, and Fresh Florida, along with contact information for the University of Florida and copyright information for the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

Florida MarketMaker

