



# Consumer Focus

► by Candace Pollock

## Tap into local foods movement

*With the current economy driving increased interest in local foods, more communities are looking to either start a farmer's market or expand an existing one as a way of fulfilling consumer demands.*

### Opportunities

Through a new Ohio State University (OSU) Extension program, Ohio farmer's market managers and vendors have access to training and technical assistance to increase their knowledge, skills and abilities in the area of farmer's market management, financing and marketing.

"With the current state of the economy, many people are expressing interest in wanting to start their own farmer's market, or existing markets are looking to find ways to attract new vendors. Consumers are interested in spending their food dollars locally to support their local producers and the local economy," says Christie Welch, an OSU Extension farmer's market specialist with OSU South Centers at Piketon. "Farmer's markets are a good way of capturing a greater share of the demand by consumers to have easy access to locally grown foods."

"Growing! Ohio Farmer's Markets" is a program launched by OSU South Center's Business Development Network that provides no-cost consulting to farmer's market managers, vendors, producers and board members to aid in improving direct marketing efforts to the consumer.

Welch says that farmer's markets can be an important source of income for local producers and an inexpensive way to direct-market products to consumers, but starting one or maintaining an existing farmer's market can be challenging.

"The biggest mistake people make is

not carefully thinking through the logistics of managing a farmer's market," Welch says. For individuals looking to start a new farmer's market, staffing, marketing and location are big factors that need to be considered.

"Most of the farmer's markets are staffed by volunteers, and it can be time-consuming. It's important to find volunteers who are committed to the market," Welch says. "Another factor is finding a suitable location that is visible to the consumer

and is convenient for the shopper, yet has adequate space for vendors and their equipment. Farmer's markets should also be handicapped accessible."

Welch recommends managers work with city, county and township officials, and local

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— Christie Welch

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## May is National Beef Month

May is National Beef Month, and the checkoff's retail program is "dashing" out to retail grocery stores across the country to celebrate with exciting summer promotions.

For starters, a Cinco de Mayo promotion with Snyder's Of Hanover® Tortilla Chips will include in-store displays featuring an instant redeemable coupon for \$2 off beef with the purchase of tortilla chips. Another one of the major components of this year's retail program is the Healthy Beef Salad promotion with partners Alberto-Culver's Mrs. Dash® and California Cheese®. During this promotion, 50 million coupons for beef will be distributed in Sunday newspaper inserts May 17.

"The great thing about these programs is that all of the coupon redemption costs are covered by promotional partners," says Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB) member Margie Hande, cow-calf producer from Amidon, N.D., and vice chair of the Joint Retail Committee. "Our checkoff investment as producers goes toward the creative development and media costs for advertising these promotions. On average, for every dollar we invest, our retail partners are putting in \$5 to \$10. That's a sizeable return on investment."

Additionally, May Beef Month includes a beer and burger promotion with longtime partners Kraft A.1.® and Anheuser-Busch Michelob® beer and will continue through June. The checkoff is also once again working with Sutter Home® wine to promote the Build a Better Burger® contest where contestants get to submit recipes for America's best beef burger for a \$50,000 cash prize.

"Partnerships through retail help demonstrate how our producer dollar is stretched to maximize our checkoff investment," Hande continues. "Our minimal investment is extending the retail program reach to millions of beef customers for the next few months. It is our hope that through these partnerships and relationships, we can continue to grow demand for our great product and thereby create profit opportunities for producers."

To round out the May Beef Month activities, a new promotion with Hormel Food's Chi Chi's® and Herdez® brands started in April and continues until July 12 (Chi Chi's east of the Mississippi and Herdez west of the Mississippi). The promotion includes in-store displays with coupon tear pads and instant redeemable coupons for \$2 off beef with the purchase of salsa. For more information about checkoff-funded programs, visit [mybeefcheckoff.com](http://mybeefcheckoff.com).

The Beef Checkoff Program was established as part of the 1985 Farm Bill. The checkoff assesses \$1 per head on the sale of live domestic and imported cattle, in addition to a comparable assessment on imported beef and beef products. States retain up to 50¢ per dollar and forward the other 50¢ to the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, which administers the national checkoff program, subject to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approval.

**Editor's Note:** Release provided by the Cattlemen's Beef Board.

businesses in finding a suitable location for the farmer's market.

"Some locations may charge rent, while other locations can be utilized free of charge. Some communities will allow a street to be closed on certain days and certain times to accommodate the farmer's market," Welch says. "Some businesses will also host farmer's markets within their location."

**Develop a marketing program**

Whether an individual is interested in starting a new farmer's market or looking to add vendors to an existing farmer's market, developing a marketing program is critical.

"Don't overlook the benefit of marketing. Developing a mission and vision statement that

outlines the market's purpose and the types of products it allows is important for attracting consumers as well as vendors,"

Welch says. "Then develop and implement your marketing plan based on the mission of the market."

Welch also encourages producers participating in a farmer's market to use

all available resources to promote their products to attract consumers.

"Invest in attractive displays — brochures, signs, fact sheets. Offer recipes or nutritional information on the products being sold,"

Welch says. "Recent research indicates that consumers shop at farmer's markets not only for the fresh, local foods, but also because they want to know the person producing the food."

Welch says that producers should also invest in product liability insurance and be aware of the rules and regulations set forth by the state's Department of Agriculture when it comes to selling food products at a farmer's market.

Producers should also be mindful of the requirements established by their local health department.

Above all, it's important for producers to maintain the quality of their products, Welch says.

"As a producer, be sure to choose a farmer's market that fits with your

individual goal, but also meets the needs of your target customers," Welch says.

Welch says with the current demand for locally grown foods outweighing the availability of farmer's markets or an adequate number of vendors, opportunities abound to launch a new business or seek out vendors to add to an existing farmer's market. One resource is Ohio MarketMaker, a free web-based tool that connects businesses in the food supply chain. To learn more, log on to <http://ohiomarketmaker.com>, or contact Julie Fox at 740-289-2071 or e-mail [fox.264@osu.edu](mailto:fox.264@osu.edu).

To learn more about additional resources through the Growing! Ohio Farmer's Markets program, log on to <http://ohiofarmersmarkets.osu.edu>, or contact Christie Welch at 740-289-2071 ext. 234 or e-mail [welch.183@osu.edu](mailto:welch.183@osu.edu).

According to the Farmer's Market Coalition, the number of farmer's markets in the United States has increased 40% during the past decade. More than 3 million consumers shop at farmer's markets, spending more than \$1 billion per year.



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**Editor's Note:** News release provided by the Communications and Technology unit of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.