



# Incorporating Sustainability Into Your Marketing

*Telling your farm's story with sustainability in mind.*

The local food movement is all about consumers wanting to know more about their food—who grew it, where, and how it was grown. Food that is more local not only reduces food miles, but gives the consumer the opportunity to find out more about it. As a direct marketing producer, you have the opportunity to tell your story in person and give your more discerning customers the assurance that they are getting a food product with the “sustainability values” they want to see.



**Stories sell!** This tool booklet is less about labels, certifications, and regulated claims, and more about talking to customers and telling your story. As a direct marketing producer, you have this opportunity at farmers markets, when convincing people to join your CSA, writing up your farm description for the local food directory, or describing your farm on your website, in social media, in articles, or in community presentations.

## INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO YOUR MARKETING



1. **Learn what people want** in their food. There are numerous sustainability values that can attract loyal customers willing to pay a fair price.
2. **Recognize what you are already doing sustainably** on your farm that could match those customer values.
3. **Describe** those sustainable aspects of your farm in your marketing “story.”
4. **Reach out** to special groups who would especially value your products.
5. **Take it to the next level** by adding more sustainable practices your customers want to see.

## WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT—UNIQUE PRODUCTS AND A GOOD STORY

**The same as anyone else's or unique?** Research shows that unless you are producing a commodity (the same product as anyone else where your only potential advantage is efficiency of production and low price), you need to differentiate your product and tell the story of you, your farm, the product, and how it was produced. This story needs to resonate with the various values that people want in the foods they would buy repeatedly and be willing to pay more for.

**Learn about sustainability values.** Nearly everyone still looks for some degree of convenience, taste, appearance, and cheapness, but increasing numbers of consumers are looking for unique products that embody their values and are attracted by a story that engages them with you and your products.



### Some Sustainability Values People Want in Their Food

#### Economic

- Productive
- Profitable
- Fair for producers
- Fair for consumers
- Good for communities
- Preserving of farms and ranches

#### Environmental

- Conserving of air/soil/water
- Restorative
- Wildlife-friendly
- Biodiverse
- Energy-conserving
- Climate-friendly
- Local
- Organic
- Preserving of open space
- Seasonally appropriate

#### Social

- Healthy/Safe/Nutritious/Fresh
- Enjoyable/Beautiful
- Culturally appropriate
- Accessible & Affordable for all
- Rewarding & Fair to all
- Community-based
- Generous (reciprocity)
- Self-sufficient
- Humane
- Traditional/Sacred
- Sovereign



**Do your market research.** You can learn a lot about sustainability values and practices from books, reports, and websites (see our Online Resources), but much more can be learned from discussions with your customers. Such conversations are an inexpensive and invaluable form of market research where you can learn what people want and how to talk about it.



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## REACHING OUT

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**Proactively marketing sustainability values.** It's quite likely that there are groups in your area that promote and work on some of the values embodied in your products—such as environmental, social justice, or farm preservation organizations. You could not only learn from them, but could consider their members or supporters as a target market. Who knows, they could even become the core of a CSA you could start.

**Speak up.** Take advantage of opportunities to speak to community groups about your products and your operation, or write articles for local magazines. Be available for interviews from the media and have your story ready.

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## TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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**Can you become more sustainable?** So far, you are just promoting the practices you are doing already, but there is always more you could do. Listen to your customers, watch fellow producers, and learn what more you can do. Obviously, it's more than marketing—it's your future and that of everything around us.

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### WRAP-UP EXERCISE

**Ask yourself these questions:**

1. What sustainability values do my customers want in their food?
2. What am I already doing sustainably on my farm that matches those customer values?
3. How can I describe those aspects of my farm in my marketing “story”?
4. What groups can I reach out to that would especially value my products?
5. What other sustainable practices can I implement to improve my product's attractiveness to customers?

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

See the Climate-Friendly Food Systems, Biodiverse & Wildlife-Friendly Food Systems, and Native & Organic Farming tool booklets and more at [www.HCFS.org](http://www.HCFS.org) under “Food System Tools.”

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