The Value of Value-Added Marketing
by Jennifer Wallace, PNDSA

The numbers are in: value-added marketing is one option to increase your farm’s bottom line. Kathleen Painter, Ag Economic Analyst at the University of Idaho, recently completed a survey of value-added marketing research nationwide and documented some interesting trends you should be aware of if you’re considering a direct to market or other value-added strategy.

The organic trend has a solid foothold in the mainstream marketplace. Over the past fifteen years, the organic market has increased 20%. It includes a shift from specialty shops to mainstream retail stores and the introduction of organic versions of existing product lines. Researchers in several different studies concluded this trend suggests consumers are dissatisfied with conventional production and are willing to pay more, within a reasonable range, for alternative food products.

But organic is no longer the only alternative game in town. The growth of the “buy local” movement, increased consumer interest in where and how their food is produced, and the perception that local can be better for the environment is opening new product and marketing opportunities for growers. The “buy local” movement bears some close study.

Research shows consumers consistently look for four primary values in their food: safety, flavor, freshness and health. It’s worth noting that surveys showed these values outweigh other factors, including what agricultural practices were used or where the food was grown. But additional surveys found that while consumers generally are not willing to pay more for a product just because it produced locally, they will pay more if they perceive a benefit to the local economy, if jobs are provided to farmers, fossil fuel use decreases and the price is within 125% of the price of comparable products. In fact, surveys showed 85% of the population would choose local products and be willing to pay more.

Painter also found in her research survey that retail markets offer as much or more potential than selling direct to consumers. This has proven true for companies like Shepherd’s Grain, which markets to bakeries and restaurants around the Pacific Northwest.

So what is value-added? The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center has identified five ways to add value to a farm operation:

1) Produce or market a real or perceived quality, such as “Washington Apples” or a high protein soft white winter wheat.
2) Reduce transaction costs. This can be achieved by marketing as a single entity, such as a co-op.

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I’m sure this newsletter finds you in the thick of spring work, kicking off another growing season. At PNDSA, we are kicking off our season as well. We are building onto the momentum from our Direct Seed Conference in February; we have a great team and several committees in place to move our Association forward.

Our 2012 Direct Seed Conference was very successful, from an educational and financial perspective, and our Association is back on track with offering networking and learning opportunities to our members and new growers interested in transitioning to direct seed practices. This year we partnered with Spokane AgExpo so Direct Seed attendees had access to two conferences for the price of one. A few of the events and activities that were very well received included the networking social with WSU, UI, Ag Leadership, Ag Forestry, and PNDSA prior to the opening dinner banquet; breakfast panel discussion on glyphosate, and precision ag topics on using satellite imagery to create application maps.

We will hold our 2013 Direct Seed conference with the Spokane AgExpo February 6-7, so mark your calendars and plan to join us for updates and training on the Direct Seed certification program, integrating precision ag technologies to make production decisions, alternative crops, CRP takeout, and more.

Another exciting development is that we have hired Kay Wolf Meyer, Colton WA, as our new Executive Director. Jennifer Wallace will continue as our newsletter editor, and we have an active Certification Committee of growers, and industry and research leaders, working together to promote and develop our association and programs to benefit direct seeders.

Kay was hired to help organize the 2012 conference; with the amount of quality work she accomplished in a very short period of time, the Board of Directors asked her to put a proposal together for the Executive Director position. Kay’s past experiences aligns perfectly with our current needs for PNDSA including event planning, marketing, project management, and technology experience. She grew up on a direct seed farm in Uniontown, WA, and she has many resources in the agriculture and conservation communities. We look forward to the organization and developmental skills she brings to our Association.

As you can see, we have a solid foundation built for moving PNDSA forward this year, and I look forward to providing updates on our progress and accomplishments.

Wishing you a safe and productive year,

Rick Jones, President

Partner Profile: Monsanto

Monsanto is proud to be an agriculture company, focused on helping growers find ways to better feed the world through the tools and technologies offered in seed, traits and crop protection products. Monsanto may share the same name and history as the industrial chemical producer founded in 1901, but since 2000, Monsanto has evolved into a 100% agricultural company helping growers increase crop yields worldwide while conserving more.

Joe Dahmen, the PNW Chemical Account Manager, emphasized “We provide tools to help growers conserve resources, and to help change their practices to protect their soil, water and reduce other inputs. Roundup brands are our number one product line in the Crop Protection Division and it’s a critical component of weed management in a direct seed system, but we’re always looking for new ways to support growers. Monsanto has developed new formulations, like RT3, and the pricing of our products is better than ever.” Monsanto support personnel are there to help growers adopt new direct seed techniques. “We are usually just a phone call away.”

Joe closed “I have been with Monsanto for 29 years, and have enjoyed watching the direct seed movement grow. I can’t understand why everyone isn’t doing some direct seeding. Not because I sell Roundup, but just because it’s the right thing to do. With direct seeding practices, you normally won’t see ruts two foot deep after heavy rainfall occurs. Anyone who spends any time driving around the Inland Northwest can see the difference direct seeding makes. Monsanto is proud to be an agriculture company, focused on helping growers find ways to better feed the world.”

Looking Forward: President Update
Meet Kay Meyer, PNDSA Executive Director

Thank you for the opportunity to be your Executive Director. This is an exciting time for Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. I’m impressed with Direct Seeders progressiveness, perseverance, and passion about direct seeding! This Association and its members believe in so much more than finding a more economical way to farm. As I have been educating myself on direct seed issues, strategies, and benefits, I have come across inspiring quotes from a few of our members all echoing sustainability, family heritage, and being good stewards of our land and environment.

Here are a few I’d like to share:
“Once only stewards of the resources and intend to leave them better than when we assumed responsibility,” Tim Danaher, Colfax, WA.
“Our goal is to be in sync with nature, produce high quality food and have fun doing it. We pledge to share our harvest and knowledge with those in need,” Lee and Joanne Druffel, Colton WA.
“Our farm is a direct seed operation working toward preserving the soil for future generations,” Kurt Blume, Genesee, ID.

PNDSA is an information sharing association supporting direct seeders and those transitioning from conventional farming. As we move forward and build a Direct Seed Certification we are going to have strong message that will resonate with a much wider audience promoting the benefits of direct seeding through improved air, soil, and water quality, wildlife habitat, and energy conservation. We will be able to market direct seed growers and the sustainable practices they have chosen as the future of farming. Direct seeders have been diligently making changes to decrease soil erosion and improve the environment, while enhancing the economic viability of farming so they can preserve family farms and be able to pass them on to future generations. That’s a powerful message and the certification grant PNDSA has received is providing financial support to get this message out to the general public through a TV and web campaign. Public Service announcements are being created with information about the certification program, interviews with direct seeders, and footage on their operations. We will send this out to our members for first viewing at the beginning of July.

I look forward to utilizing my past experience to revitalize this Association and increase membership. In addition to the development of the direct seed certification and marketing efforts, other 2012 areas of focus are: 1) improving membership and partnership benefits; 2) enhancing the website to include a central calendar of direct seed events, posting of research and resource information, and highlighting our members and sponsors; and 3) Association planning and budgeting to ensure we have a strategic plan in place to continue to grow and support our members.

Being involved with the direct seed conference and my first few weeks on board has renewed my pride in farming especially direct seeders who are leading the way to the new age of farming. Please let me know if there are issues, information, and resources that you need to improve your operations and take it to the next level. I look forward to meeting you all.

Wishing you a productive and successful year,
– Kay Meyer

Glyphosate Resistance

Monsanto Responds

The question of herbicide resistance in weeds has been a topic of conversation at conferences and meetings since the 1950’s. Recently, a Capital Press headline announced that weeds developing resistance to Roundup herbicide, could limit growers ability to continue with the practice of direct seeding. The National Research Council is hosting a conference May 10th in Washington D.C. bringing producers, scientists, agronomists, government and industry representatives together to discuss herbicide resistance in general as to the causes, opportunities and barriers to manage this situation.

When asked recently to share Monsanto’s perspective on glyphosate resistance, Wayne Jelinek, US Roundup and RT 3 herbicide Manager for Monsanto, was straightforward. “There is no way to completely prevent resistance to agricultural herbicides used today. Where we’ve seen issues with resistant weeds is in areas that are traditionally monocalmiculture in nature with continuous use of one herbicide for pre and post applications. The two recent examples are Roundup Ready soybean cropping systems in the Mid-West and Roundup Ready cotton production in the South. Even within these areas, Roundup herbicide continues to be the foundation of most weed control systems; however other herbicides with various modes of action are now being used to address specific weeds now missed by glyphosate. With the growth of conservation tillage along with continued adoption of Roundup Ready crops in other countries, Roundup and RT 3 herbicide use continues on page 4
3) Bundle existing products in a unique way and enter a new market. Beef and lumber producers have partnered to market BBQ packages with beef and flavored wood chips – the “ultimate grilling experience.”
4) Market a commodity with qualities that improve efficiency up the supply chain, and therefore command a premium price.
5) Own assets at multiple points along the supply chain.

Value-added is about creating new value and opening new markets. This takes time, energy, money and a certain amount of risk. So why make the investment or take the risk? According to an Ag of the Middle (AOTM) analysis “mid-sized farms are the most vulnerable in today’s polarized markets.” AOTM, a national initiative by researchers and industry, defines a mid-sized farm as one generating $50,000-$500,000 in gross annual income, where one family member provides the primary labor and decision making, and the family income is significantly dependent on the farm. AOTM bases this assessment on some sobering USDA 2007 census data, including the below chart which shows that from 1997-2007, mid-sized farms decreased in number while small and large farms increased. AOTM believes these operations are paying the price for being too small to compete in the highly consolidated commodity markets and too large and commoditized to sell in a practical way directly to consumers.

Differentiated, or value-added, products provide a way to get around the challenge of being too big for direct-to-market and too small to compete in major commodity markets. It provides a means to improve income – whether through value-based marketing, organizational marketing through co-operatives, etc.

The research shows the market will respond to value-added products. The question is, will it work for your operation? See page 5 for examples of how three people are making value-added work for them.
David Brewer, a farmer and rancher from The Dalles, Oregon, is expanding his operation to include specialty beef production, both through a co-op and direct-to-market. Asked to share his thoughts on entering a new market, David commented “we had the luxury of starting small. Wheat pays the big bills and the cattle have always been a minor part of our business. As all of our cattle were going into the Country Natural Beef program (a co-op with 120 members across the western United States), we could start with just a couple of head and grow slowly. This allowed us to ramp up our skills and systems as our customer base grew. We have done very little advertising, mostly relying on word of mouth and good references from our existing customers.”

“We have sold now for three years at the local farmers market. That hasn’t paid for our time very well, but the local market for natural beef is smaller and we have one solid local competitor who is more dedicated to being there every Saturday than we can be.”

Brewer emphasized creating a dependable product. For his operation, it was critical to find a good, trustworthy processor who was willing to consistently do what the Brewer’s asked. It was also crucial to stabilize the herd’s genetics. “Our genetics have been fairly stable now for 15 years so I think we are able to produce a consistent product from one year to the next.”

Brewer is trying to expand into chickens and grass finished beef. “Grain finishing seems pretty easy now. We are still learning how to grass finish well and relying on those dedicated early customers to help us learn the best way to produce a great eating experience based entirely on forages. We have the equipment already for planting annual crops; we just have to learn how to produce a high quality forage sequence.”

“We are trying the same slow ramp up with chickens, but we’re taking a break from them this year. The cost of transporting birds to and from processing, on top of the cost of processing itself, has been a problem. By the time we paid for all of that we needed to charge more for the birds than most people locally wanted to pay. On-farm processing is an option but we haven’t gotten excited about doing that work ourselves.”

Brewer closed with some marketing advice. “What we learned from CNB and have transferred to both Shepherd’s Grain and our direct marketing is that we have to learn how to tell our story. We have a family farm story that is of interest to a certain portion of the food market. If you can tell it well, they are willing to reward you with higher prices to support the farm and us. But the product has to be good.”

Russ Zenner’s farm outside of Genesee, Idaho provided the grain for the first run of Shepherd’s Grain flour, and his experience with value-added marketing bears out Kate Painter’s research. Over the years he has tried several value-added options, and has found that certain labels have value with consumers, including “locally produced” and “organic.” But others, such as “enhanced nutrition” or “environmentally sustainable” require more consumer education. “Consumers aren’t necessarily at the point where they value these labels and are willing to pay more for them, so simply having a certification isn’t going to be enough on its own. Its going to require a lot of consumer education and marketing. That is the great thing about the Department of Ecology grant for the Direct Seed Certification. It is already doing the education up front.”

Zenner pointed out that consumer education is an on-going effort, particularly because of what he sees as a disconnect in the consumer’s mind between organic and sustainable farm practices. “Organic production historically has required more intensive tillage for weed control. It’s the reason that I have chosen to go a direct seed system, to control soil erosion on highly erodible land. The biggest threat to our land is tillage – it costs us organic matter and increases run off. But consumers don’t necessarily see the value of sustainable farming at first glance because they’re used to looking for the ‘organic’ label.”

“Whatever you try, it has to have value in the consumer’s eyes. The urban grocery purchaser has a tremendous amount of power. They are, in fact, a resource management driver – ultimately dictating the use of our nation’s resources. If they want identity preserved, locally grown, environmentally sustainable food, it will happen.”

Zenner emphasized that any certification growers consider should be distinct enough to make a difference. “It is a critical part of adding value -- there has to be a significant enough distinction between your product and any other by the time you bring it to market.”

continued on Page 6
Zenner recommended the Food Alliance and their certification program, a nationally recognized alternative to “organic.” Zenner’s farm holds the first Food Alliance certification in the state of Idaho, but it took some time, education and persistence to get the Food Alliance to agree to certify a cropping system, not just a crop. He noted that the Food Alliance has a social component to their program. “They look for how employees are treated, where chemicals are stored and how they’re managed, but they also provide significant help through the certification process.” Zenner credits their Food Alliance certification with access to Shepherd’s Grain’s early customers, including Bon Appetit, Grand Central Bakery, and Hot Lips Pizza.

There were challenges to starting up a small, identity preserved flour business. Developing the market took “a lot of time and effort, pounding the pavement, and learning to tell our story” according to Zenner. The biggest financial risk early on was maintaining enough inventory to meet potential demand. Finding the right partner to handle milling for Shepherd’s Grain was another challenge. It was a matter of lucky timing finding ADM in Spokane willing to preserve the identity of the relatively small run of Shepherd’s Grain flour. Determining market price can be difficult – to cover the increased cost of production required by identity preservation, provide a reasonable rate of return and still be in the range the consumer is willing to pay. Shepherd’s Grain costs are higher, but they have found customers who are committed to supporting local, sustainable producers.

The payments to Shepherd’s Grain producers have also been a challenging point. As market price has fluctuated there have been times when Shepherd’s Grain payments above or below, that price. But wise management decisions aren’t just about maximizing returns in any one year – it’s about making sure the farm income is diverse enough and the land healthy enough to see you and those who follow you through the years ahead.

Janine Zacca Zenner met Chris Zenner in Miami, Florida when he interned with a company where she worked. Janine’s parents are Lebanese, and her family moved to Florida in the 1970s. Food is a center of most Mediterranean cultures, and this is especially true in Janine’s family. Pride is taken in making traditional meals which include lentils and garbanzos in their every day recipes. It may have been a bit of destiny at work that Janine should meet and marry a young man from a farm in the pulse growing capital of the world.

The families blended happily, with Janine’s mother soon swearing off all other garbanzos and lentils except those produced on the Zenner family farm. Which was why she was shocked during a visit a few years ago to find her daughter making the family hummus recipe using canned garbanzo beans. A friendly family discussion over ingredients took place, but in the end Janine had to agree her mother was right. Her hummus recipe, already popular with her friends, was noticeably better when she took the time to cook with garbanzos from the Zenner farm. So much so that they encouraged her to see if she could market the recipe.
It helped to have family members with experience in business and marketing for advice and encouragement but Janine points out that she knew nothing about the specialty food business when she started. She was quick to seek advice from the experts. A friend of Kathy Zenner’s pointed her to the University of Idaho Food Technology Center (FTC) in Caldwell, a food business incubator designed to help entrepreneurs like Janine get started. A year and a half ago, Janine spent $75 for the required one-day Specialty Food Class, which covered everything from production to marketing. Afterwards, she met with the Director and the food technologist and they gave her access to the commercial kitchen. They helped her develop a commercial scale recipe from her unique family recipe. With advisors guiding her every step of the way, Janine developed a small production batch, just for sampling to conduct market research in the Boise area.

The FTC kitchen manager put Janine in touch with the director of the Capital City Public Market, Boise’s Saturday farmer’s market, who welcomed the idea of a test booth for Janine’s hummus. Janine was overwhelmed by the response. In one afternoon she collected 267 surveys. She found that 94% thought her hummus tasted as good or better than others, and more surprisingly to her, that 89% of those surveyed had already purchased hummus. It was good to know there was already a demand.

Armed with that information, Janine obtained her business and food producers licenses, and she and Chris formed ZZ Foods, LLC. Unwilling to spend too much on brand and package design, Janine searched the internet and found The Marketing Goddess based in Meridian, Idaho. This business specializes in helping start ups and charges only 75 cents per minute for design. Janine spent less than $200 for package and brand design, compared to the up to $5000 she’d been quoted elsewhere.

Janine conducted the market analysis herself, visiting five local grocery stores to tally the number of brands, their flavors, container size, etc. The www.Idaho.gov website provided helpful small business start up information. The UI’s FTC provided help with business plan review and practical marketing advice. The kitchen manager is herself part-owner of a local business. The FTC also provides an opportunity to network with other food start-ups. “It was good to be able to collaborate with other local vendors who are at a similar stage in their growth. Just to be able to ask simple questions like ‘Where do you get your supplies?’ was really helpful.”

A few months later she had her first account with the Boise Co-op. “It was amazing. As soon as I said I had a fresh, local product with no preservatives, they were interested. Before they had even tasted it, they saw the labels, heard my story, and were asking when I’d be able to bring the product in.”

ZZ Foods now has nine accounts and more pending all around the Treasure Valley. One is Rosauers, a new presence in the area, who approached the UI Food Technology Center to find local products to stock. Janine didn’t meet personally with Rosauers before they asked to include her line, although she’s reasonably sure they checked the product line at the Boise Co-op and based their decisions on recommendations from the FTC.
It might seem like Zacca Hummus is starting to sell itself, but Janine is quick to point out that it is important to be in touch with your customers. She books a tasting booth within a week of her product arriving in a new store. Once people try one of her hummus flavors, she’s found that 3 of 5 will buy the product that day. “The key words ‘local’ and ‘fresh’ will get you in the door; it gets the customers’ attention. But tasting and having the grower there to answer questions makes all the difference in the sale.” The garbanzos in Zacca Hummus are Food Alliance certified, but Janine has found that customers appreciate a chance to visit with the grower, to understand the difference between organic and sustainable farming. “You have to know your story and how to use it to market your product.”

One of the best things Janine felt she did was to listen and act on all the advice she received from the experts at the FTC. “Not everything proved to be exactly the right decision for my company, but starting as I did, I was lucky to have access to that level of expertise and experience – all for a $75 class.”

Looking forward, Janine and Chris are pleased ZZ Foods has already found this level of success, but they aren’t in a rush to expand. “I am hopeful we will saturate the Boise Valley market by the end of the year. There are some food trade shows coming to the area this fall, and we will be there to see what kind of a demand we might find outside our area. We’re researching the next natural steps of growing the company. But I am very conservative, and if I’m going to make any mistakes, I’d rather do them while we’re small and local, still housed at the UI’s test kitchen.”

Soil Acidity and Direct Seeding

by David Huggins, Soil Scientists, USDA-ARS at WSU

Direct-seeding can stop and even reverse soil degradation due to erosion, soil organic matter depletion and declining biodiversity. The process of soil acidification, however, continues under direct-seeding, although its characteristics are very different than found under inversion tillage practices. Soil acidification began to accelerate in dryland regions of the Pacific Northwest as farmers started using ammonium-based fertilizers in the 1950’s. Fertilizers such as anhydrous ammonia and aqua release hydrogen (H+) ions when microbes convert ammonium to nitrate-N. One measure of soil acidity is pH which is equal to the −log (H+), the higher the (H+), the lower the pH. Prior to agriculture many Palouse soils were near neutral in pH (7.0) in the surface foot, but Mahler and coworkers (1985) reported that by the 1980’s soil pH had declined to values below 6.0 in up to 65% of surveyed fields in northern Idaho and parts of eastern Washington.

Since the 1980’s, soil pH has continued to decline throughout the region. With the practice of direct-seeding, where soil mixing is limited, considerable stratification of soil acidity can occur near the surface corresponding to where fertilizer is placed (Figure 1). The full implications of stratified soil acidity are not known, however, this characteristic may lend itself to more targeted lime applications.

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Soil Acidification can lead to many problems including aluminum and micronutrient (Mn) toxicity, decreased phosphorus availability and deficiencies, molybdenum deficiency, reduced soil biological activity, reduced nutrient use efficiency and overall reductions in crop vigor and yield. Mahler and McDole (1987) defined critical pH (1:1 soil:water ratio) values in the surface foot of soil as 5.5 to 5.6 for peas and lentil, and 5.2 to 5.4 for wheat and barley. Below these soil pH values, crop yields decreased significantly. These yield-critical soil pH data were derived mainly for soils in northern Idaho and eastern Washington that were formed under forests rather than prairie grass vegetation (Figure 2 on page 9). Crops grown in areas where soils were formed under forests are at greater risk of aluminum toxicity as these soils naturally have a lower soil pH, lower base saturation and higher concentrations of exchangeable aluminum than soils formed under native grasses.
What can be done? Monitoring soil pH through sampling is important. Inexpensive, hand-held pH meters are now available that could aid in-field soil pH evaluations. In addition to stratification of soil pH with depth, considerable in-field variation can also occur. For example at the WSU Cook Agronomy Farm, soil pH in the surface 4 inches varied from 4.5 to over 6.5 across a 92 acre field (Huggins, unpublished). The within field variation in soil pH strongly suggests that treatments, such as lime applications should be tailored to site-specific locations rather than uniformly applied. Lime effectiveness is highly dependent on its characteristics, particularly particle size. For example, lime particles that pass through a 100-mesh sieve or finer, react with soil in 6 months or less; 60-mesh or finer, react in the 1st year; 20-mesh but not 60 mesh, about 50% in the 1st year; while particles not passing a 20-mesh sieve have little liming value. Preliminary research has shown that considerable variation in aluminum tolerance exists among winter and spring wheat varieties (see Koenig and co-workers, 2011 for more information). Varieties with greater aluminum tolerance should be selected for fields that have low soil pH. In the long-term, however, liming will be required as the soil acidification process continues.

Soil Acidity

References and Further Information

The Summer Direct Link will continue this important topic with a look at management suggestions to address soil acidification or, see these publications:


Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association

A grower directed, commodity neutral, non-profit organization promoting environmentally and economically sustainable direct seed cropping systems.

Spread the word!

Membership benefits include...

- Reduced fees at the Annual Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Conference.
- Representation to government on policy and program development that affect the environment and direct seed growers.
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- Latest information and research on direct seed cropping systems.
- Peer support for growers developing their direct seed cropping systems.
- Input into research throughout the Pacific Northwest.

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