

How Much is Enough? Strategically Managing Your Presence at Multiple Markets

Panelists:

Donna Mionis (Donna's Daily Bread)

John Barnstein (Maine-ly Poultry)

Moderator:

Heather Omand (MOFGA)

NOTES:

(General talk) Possibly holding a market at local college??? Biggest obstacle being a space to call home.

What about towns giving a building that is run down to the market and giving it a facelift and having a marketplace?

John: In business for 28 years broilers, turkeys, 45 milk goats everyday. Began going to market in 1991. At the time probably 4 or 5 major markets in area. Started by doing Camden and Damariscotta. Most done in year is 10 markets in 1 week. Winter markets really helping sustain farm. Now going year round, does 5 all winter long. Part of the problem now is there are so many markets around really hard to pick where you'll do well. Requires you have transportation and people to staff the stand and enough product to sell there. Markets have become diluted because there's so many now. What you used to be able to make at one market you almost have to travel to many just to make what you used to make at a few. Loves markets, they are a great tool. Can talk to customers face to face and customers like to meet their farmers. Chose his markets by looking at logistics of the market. Was offered a market stand at Portland Mall which started with 30 vendors but market never took off. It lasted for 3 years and just dissipated. Tried to get it going again but it isn't the right location. No obvious reason why some don't work they just don't. You have to pick and choose and see which ones work.

Donna: 12 markets a week all family run. Has about 30 stores which they wholesale to. Started doing markets in 2006. Husband got out of corporate work wanted something else. Donna went to a women's (not sure) group and tried to see what she could do. Found out people liked the bread that she made and people wanted it. That was what she could do. Got into the market took 14 loafs sold them all, then it took off from there. Snowballed from there and even had markets come to them and asked to attend their market. Chose markets in same area where they were delivering so they mesh, resulting in less travel cost and it works out well. Tried some seemingly great areas with good traffic that should have worked and yet some locations just don't work. You have to try it and see what happens. A work in progress.

John has left a market. He went to Camden for 16 to 17 years. It was his best market for very long time, but the Camden area the sales have started to go down for all the vendors. No one really knew what the problem was but some of it may have been due to no young people coming and the older folks are only there a certain time of the year. It's hard to give it up especially because these people aren't just customers they become family. You see many generations. Markets are a very social thing and it's very hard to give up on one. However economically sometimes you have to give up a market. Even at times can be due to politics. You really have to look at all sides friends, sales, politics.

Donna: Never turned down markets in route to wholesale but has turned down wholesale due to route. And you really need to commit to what you say to your markets. If you say you'll do 5 markets, then do it. Keep a line open. She had a family issue come up and a market they did on Tuesday wanted to do a Friday one. Hired someone to run the stall and had everything all set. However after just a few weeks the market went from having vendors to do 2 days to just themselves and it makes it hard for the ones who are there.

Very organized: Schedule what's avail on what days and times so she knows what can be committed to.

Leaving one market for another? Can show a lack of commitment. When they said they'd be there they were. Could have given up a market to possibly have a better market, but they had a customer base and it's a true commitment to those customers. Even though there were issues, they worked through them to keep a market on their list.

John: If you're thinking about going to more than one market and have to hire someone, make sure it's someone who knows what they are doing and knows what you are doing so they can properly represent you. If you don't hire the right person, it could hurt your business more than help you.

How did you come to decision to hire?

Donna: It's been family. They know what we are doing and they keep it running. It hasn't been easy you have to pick, even with family, someone who will really represent you right.

John: We sell chickens, raise chickens, and slaughter chickens. It's not a clean business and the last few years we've had foreign ag students come over. We house them and they learn a lot they stay for up to a year. Their work ethic is great. Great kids they become part of the family and work very hard in their own country and it's a neat thing for them as they get to take the product to market and meet the customers. They build a great skill and have a great experience. It's a very important thing to have the right people.

Sales. The best person you can send to market is yourself, but by sending the right person sales are still great. If you can be there people like it more. They like to meet the owner, so if you can go, go. If you can't, then get someone who will truly represent you as if they were you.

How do you pick where you go to market?

John: (who does 4 markets on Sat.) alternates with Orono every other week and just a selfish thing.

Donna: Tried changing places with her husband and didn't like it went back to where they were because of the link with their customers. It depends on where you work best and staying consistent.

Wondering on what thoughts if there is a market that's not doing well. Location or days? What's your thought on changing?

Donna: STAY if you can stay. People don't like change and it makes it hard for them to follow. Stay consistent. Some of our customers are even at the point if they don't see our usual car they don't think we are there.

How long do you try at one place if it isn't working?

Donna: 3 years! It's the make or break time frame give it 3 years to get your following going to get the word out.

John: Damariscotta moving for the 5th time in his 19 years. 1st time was the market got too big for its space. Shoppers backing out onto Rt 1 and parking was hard. 2nd location was an antique place. It takes customers 1 year to get used to your move. People weren't willing to cross Rt 1 to go to the market. Sales were down 1st year which we expected but 2nd year wasn't great. 3rd year we moved to church, but got going again and still ran into not enough room. The 4th move was onto a great property but was a hill and hard for older folks and again there was a Rt 1 crossing. Now going back to almost same spot at Round Top Ice Cream. People are creatures of habit. Moving is a hard thing to do.

Try to advertise when moving advertising is a big topic alone. When we move we try to put it out there as much as possible, but still takes people about a year to get used to the move. Moving time or day there again depends on the market. Boothbay is a summer market for summer people. It depends on who's in the area the market is in. It still takes people time to change. Changing just the time isn't too much of a change. You still have those who, if they can get there, they will.

Union market even did a survey to find the time that people come but are still getting mixed results. Some say this time and others want a different time. Need to find a happy medium. Even high traffic areas in Augusta can still not produce a good turn out. Maybe with some markets could try just adding to the current schedule, like if you already have a Friday adding a Sunday to the lineup and see how it works, so you're not changing so much for your customer base.

What is your experience with winter markets? Do you see people buy more since they are shopping less frequently?

Donna: We put out actual dates not just “third Weds. of the month” and we have been very successful.

Wholesale vs market? How do you evaluate doing wholesale with equip verses market.

John: All markets have dues but it’s so small the cost is covered very quickly by selling your products to people who are going there to buy products. Wholesale are good to have since they are guaranteed and farmers’ markets can change even depending on the weather. The opportunity to get retail price for your products can cover any costs you may have to show up at the market, so one helps the other. It all depends on what works best for your business

Donna: We always have ours work well with all. 1/3 comes from market 1/3 from wholesale and 1/3 from big events and we educate where we will be. Also I have some things that I keep just at markets to help draw people in. I have a set of products that are only available at the farmers’ market. Many reasons could be your packaging; maybe it doesn’t do well with handling in a store.

John: Don’t have as big a markup on retail prices as on wholesale, since I’d rather have people come to the market and give them a better deal and markup wholesale prices higher.

It’s a great thing more markets are coming up especially to see the support local foods is getting. Looking at Maine as a forerunner for buying local. Especially in areas that don’t have anything. Having local foods more avail is making a difference. However markets are coming up faster than the customers are coming up. More people will come but its going to take time.

What do you have to put into a market to keep yourself going?

John: My idea is that if you belong to a market you need to contribute to the market. We have meetings—not that they’re the best part but its needed to make sure you’re all talking about helping the market grow. It makes it easier to have more people involved and helping. Bothers me to see vendors join a market and not help. If you want to grow your business you need to help. It’s essential for everyone to be involved.