



## Chapter 12

# Marketing

The area of marketing is challenging for many growers. They are producers first, managers second, and marketers last. Profit will be affected by giving marketing a greater priority. Competition from new, inexperienced growers for retail and pick-your-own sales and wholesale California berries in local supermarkets will always provide a serious challenge or opportunity for growth. Those who can adapt and interpret change and take corrective action will become stronger as a result of adversity.

Potential customer needs must be a priority. The emphasis is no longer on trying to sell what you can produce but on trying to produce what you can sell. Successful growers recognize that customers' needs are more than just purchasing a good quality berry.

The pick-your-own industry is making a rapid shift from production emphasis to a marketing emphasis. A marketing concept emphasizes planning the total business around the specific needs of a target customer group while maximizing volume within a short picking season. The marketing plan develops around product, price, promotion, and place.

In pick-your-own, the product is not only quality but also fresh fruit of the season, produced in clean fields with friendly people. The product can

be part of a family outing as recreation or fun at home making jam and jelly (Figure 12-1).

Determine the price per pound by developing a budget showing all costs. However, it should be as the customer sees the value of a fresh berry. Volume pricing or offering coupons are other ideas for determining price. One price through the season is best.

Promotion of pick-your-own has brought different degrees of success, but word-of-mouth is widely accepted as the best and least expensive advertisement. If customers have been treated warmly and fairly, they'll tell others. Radio, newspapers, and free television exposure are used. Generally, 3 to 5 percent of the budget is used for promotion. Timing of advertising is critical. Weather plays an important part in people coming to the farm.

Location is vital to success. A location near a large metropolitan population is best, but 50 percent or more of the customers may come from a 25-mile radius when they are assured of a good supply of berries. Aggressive, market-oriented growers are considering moving their locations or adding locations to their operations to be more accessible to the growing market. Specialty stores and other outlets may be looking for hand-harvested berries.



*Figure 12-1. Pick-your-own strawberry plantings offer fresh, high-quality berries as well as an outing for families.*

## Pick-Your-Own Considerations

Pick-your-own offers savings in picking, packing, and delivery. However, costs for supervision, advertising, parking space, check-out people, and liability insurance can be high. Generally, profits are higher, particularly if the average customer purchases 20 pounds per person.

It is best to sell fruit by weight. Most operators furnish the container and charge a fee per container to reduce the labor and time for weighing the fruit. The grower must acquaint the customers with operating procedures such as price, weighing, and children in the field. Signs (Figure 12-2) and supervisors expedite the picking and checkout process. Signs are also useful in attracting customers and providing directions to the planting. It is important to remember that any signs you post represent your business; therefore, they should present the desired information and should be attractive.

More importantly, growers must monitor, review, and evaluate their marketing plan to be effective. At the end of the season, review all activities. Were they accomplished on time? Goals should be measurable in numbers, when possible.

Use key people in your organization to discuss their ideas with you. Their involvement increases their commitment. Seeking outside help from a local marketing expert can pay big dividends.

Successful businesses do not concentrate on fighting competition. Instead, they concentrate their time, efforts, and finances on managing and developing their own business. Successful growers understand their costs, develop a marketing plan, and act accordingly.

Successful growers belong and participate in professional associations to improve their marketing efforts. An intentional, well-planned, well-executed marketing effort generates significant returns to the aggressive grower.



Figure 12-2. Attractive signage plays an important role in drawing customers to pick-your-own strawberry plantings. In addition, quality signs promise a quality food product for the consumer.