2009

Leveraging student expertise to solve food production marketing problems

Kay M. Palan
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports

Part of the Agribusiness Commons, Agricultural Education Commons, Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons, and the Marketing Commons

Recommended Citation
Palan, Kay M., "Leveraging student expertise to solve food production marketing problems" (2009). Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports. 320.
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports/320

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Leveraging student expertise to solve food production marketing problems

Abstract
Teams of business, agriculture, and food science student teams worked with small market farmers to help them make better business decisions about their operations.

Keywords
Marketing, Business management distribution and marketing, Market research and feasibility studies

Disciplines
Agribusiness | Agricultural Education | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Marketing

This article is available at Iowa State University Digital Repository: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports/320
What is the impact of using multifunctional student teams to address food production marketing issues?

Project investigators found that they could successfully leverage students’ knowledge to help Iowa farmers at no cost other than their time. This is a valuable but underutilized resource for farmers.

Background

Many individuals in the food and fiber production industry lack the business and/or marketing education needed to start or run a business. There is ample evidence that food and fiber producers who lack marketing expertise are at a higher risk for business failure. Buying marketing advice often is not an option for small-scale food and fiber producers who may be operating on tight budgets.

A potential pool of marketing expertise to assist these producers could be found among the senior-level students in the Iowa State University marketing department. In addition, there is a pool of agriculture and food science students with complementary experience. These students have had the requisite coursework, and are looking for real-world projects on which to use their knowledge. This project attempted to pair producers who need marketing expertise with students who need to apply academic knowledge to real life situations.

Specific objectives for the project were to:

1. Conduct marketing research and analysis for at least six Iowa food/fiber producers that will be used in managing their production enterprises.
2. Provide experiential learning opportunities for at least 12 marketing and 12 agriculture-related students.
3. Increase students’ learning of marketing and agricultural business concepts and application of those concepts.
4. Increase students’ appreciation of interdisciplinary team work.

Approach and methods

Six teams of students were identified to work with six different food and fiber producers on designated marketing problems. Each student team included students majoring in marketing, agriculture and food science, so that the students would gain multi-disciplinary knowledge as well as work together to help producers. Delivery of this service to producers was organized as an experiential marketing course offered through the ISU College of Business.
The six producers were chosen to represent a cross-section of the variety of Iowa-based food and fiber producers. The producers included:

- Creative Composites, a manufacturing company in Brooklyn, working with bio-composite materials made with kenaf
- Naturally Iowa, a value-added dairy cooperative located in southwestern Iowa
- T. J. Farms, a producer of ecotype prairie grass seed, located in McCallsburg
- Pheasant Run Farm, Inc., a Van Horne producer of culinary and medicinal herbs
- Jasper Winery, a winery in Newton
- Center Grove Orchards, a family-run apple orchard and destination farm in Cambridge

In year two, the project was repeated with another set of producers. They were:

- Picket Fence Creamery, Woodward
- Green Bean Project, western Iowa
- Grown Locally, northeast Iowa
- Wills Family Orchard, Adel
- White Oak Vineyards, Elkhart
- Home Meal Replacement, southwest Iowa

**Results and discussion**

The marketing course was offered through the ISU College of Business, but was open to student enrollment from other colleges. An individual in the agribusiness faculty was designated to serve as a mentor for the student teams dealing with ag business issues. The Leopold Center identified the food producers to work with the students while the professor in charge of the project recruited the student team members.

**Conclusions**

The basic purpose of this project was to provide effective marketing expertise to producers and to provide experiential learning for students. Both of these goals were achieved. Marketing projects ranged from evaluating marketing opportunities to developing communication and marketing plans.

Using students to address marketing problems saved the producers many hours that they did not have to invest in addressing the issues. From their viewpoint, the projects were very successful not only in providing answers and usable plans, but also in saving time to do other things critical to their businesses. Similarly, students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the depth and breadth of learning that occurred. Moreover, the students were genuinely pleased that their efforts were helpful to Iowa producers. Overall, this project demonstrated that it is possible to use students’ knowledge and abilities to successfully address producers’ marketing issues.

**Leveraged funds**

No additional funds were leveraged for this project.