

Marketing of Organic Products is An Indispensable Postharvest Activity

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SUMMARY

Organic farming requires a commitment to the fundamental principles of organic agriculture which does not however preclude interest in its potential profitability, hence the need for marketing. As a postharvest activity, marketing of organic produce requires farmers to undertake marketing research, broaden their knowledge of products, regulatory requirements, promotion methods as well as channels, and the different types of marketing available to them.

INTRODUCTION

Organic products are the results of farming systems that, to the greatest extent practicable, do not use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, hormones, feed additives. They are the outcome of systems that are supportive of the environment, improves agro-ecosystem health, employ inputs from animal and plant sources, and takes advantage of biodiversity and recycling. Organic products have gained prominence because the conventional farming system is seen as polluter of natural resources (FAO, 2015). The market growth of the subsector was greater than 500% over the last 15 years (Willer and Lernoud, 2016). Marketing of organic products includes the activity, institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering organic products that have value for customers, clients, partners, and the society. It constitutes a major factor in the success of organic farmers (Singh, 2003) since demand for organic product is growing rapidly though market shares remain quite small. Marketing efforts for organic food usually focus on values such as presenting the product as environmentally friendly (universalism), healthy (benevolence), and as a means of defying the system (independent thought and action). Organic farmers must however do more to position themselves as competitive alternatives to traditional food providers. This means implementing marketing strategies that present organic goods not simply as food, but as a way of improving personal health and lifestyle, fighting poverty and hunger, combating misuse of natural resources and climate change (IFOAM, 2015). It also means aggregating efforts to capture a larger market share than the products of traditional or conventional agricultural systems.

Marketing Research

Successful marketing of organic products is contingent on marketing research. As an indispensable function, it links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information. It helps organic farmers to identify and define problems and opportunities; generate, refine, and evaluate actions; monitor performance; and improve understanding of the process. Marketing research is all the more important for organic products because the organic food market is characterized by consumers buying organic food products for different motivations and values. Further, these consumers have different buying processes that are not the result of a single decision but a series of decisions embedded in each other.

Specifically, conducting marketing research equips organic farmers with requisite knowledge for effective marketing of organic products which includes

- An understanding of organic products to be marketed, its features, functions, benefits, uses, limitations and potential for differentiation in the marketplace.
- A grasp of regulatory requirements which spans processing, packaging and storage of organic products and typically encompasses aspects such as labeling, packaging, transport, and retailing arrangements.
- A detailed grip of the market for organic produce including diverse sectors, regions of production, and population. Along this line, marketing research would also help farmers understand their customer base, the concept of place distribution and the extent of market coverage for a given organic product.
- An appreciation of promotion methods and appropriate tactics that would encourage short-term purchase, influence trial and quantity of purchase that is measurable in volume, share and profit.
- An understanding of pricing and competitive prices that a customer must pay to acquire a product. Since organic products tend to have higher prices, it helps farmers factor in both implicit and explicit costs.

Types of Marketing Available to Organic Farmers

There are different types of marketing available to organic farmers. That said, farmers are advised to adopt a mix of marketing types to maximize results.

- **Green Marketing:** This is the most directly applicable to organic farming as it describes efforts to produce, promote, and package products in a manner that is sensitive to ecological concerns. It refers to the promotion of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe.
- **Influencer Marketing:** This focuses on leveraging individuals who have influence over potential buyers and orienting activities around these individuals to drive a message to consumers of organic products and the larger market.
- **Relationship marketing:** This refers to approaches and tactics for segmenting consumers to build loyalty. It leverages database marketing, behavioural advertising and analytics to target organic products' consumers and create loyalty programs.
- **Content Marketing:** This is a technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience with the objective of driving profitable customer action. This may include content intended to educate on the benefits of consuming organic products.
- **Guerilla Marketing:** This describes an unconventional and creative strategy intended to get maximum results from minimal resources. This is appropriate for small-scale organic farmers.

Marketing Channels

There are two main options when it comes to providing organic products to consumers; wholesale or direct markets. Selecting markets for promoting organic produce entails distinguishing between the different characteristics of each of these markets. Depending on volume to be sold, organic products can be sold at farmers' markets, grocery stores, restaurants and small or big retailers.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the connection between production and marketing cum commercialization of organic products cannot be overemphasized. Organic farmers must demonstrate a grasp of marketing to be able to run their ventures profitably.

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