

Schacht Farm Market



A Case Study from the Ohio Direct Marketing Team

Schacht Farm Market, 5950 Shannon Road, Canal Winchester, OH 43110, Lisa & David Schacht

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Business Overview

Schacht Farm Market began selling fresh quality fruits and vegetables to the local central Ohio community in 1981 with 11 acres and 3 types of vegetables. Today, the farm has more than 60 acres and provides a variety of fresh homegrown produce and the “Pick Your Own” experience to a diverse group of urban and suburban customers. Their retail farm market is open from the end of April to the end of October.



Marketing Strategy



As fifth generation farmers, David and Lisa Schacht both grew up on dairy farms before deciding their future in agriculture would be selling fresh produce. The Schachts differentiate their market from the grocery store by focusing on freshness and offering consumers a connection to the family farm. Their overall marketing strategy is to take advantage of their great location and to keep things as simple as possible – simple product line, simple packaging, simple displays, simple customer communications, and simple marketing methods.

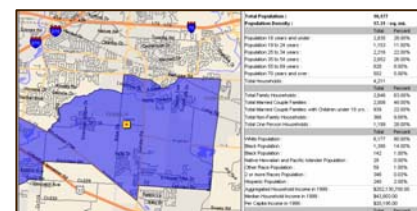
Products/Services (*packaging, pricing, payments*)

Schacht Farm Market sells a variety of fruits and vegetables, beginning with strawberries and asparagus at the end of April and continuing with favorites such as tomatoes, peas, peppers, melons, berries, squash, and sweet corn. In the autumn, they attract niche markets with products such as Pick Your Own greens and bulk potatoes. Most products are displayed to make it easy for customers to select their own. Pricing is adjusted when select products are packaged or offered in larger quantities. In addition to the produce they grow, they purchase tree fruits and other quality produce to meet consumer demand. They offer new products based on customer suggestions, and discontinue products based on sales levels. Other than food items, the Schachts grow soy and wheat as rotational crops and retail straw and squirrel corn. They accept a variety of forms of payment, including cash, checks, credit cards, debit cards, food stamp benefits, senior farmers’ market nutrition program coupons.

People (Customers)

The majority (85%) of Schacht’s sales are retail. Over the years, their customer mix has shifted from people wanting bulk produce to preserve to more people wanting convenient access to fresh local food and the recreational farm experience. “The growth in demand for local foods has become very prevalent, so the impact for us is new clientele,” commented Lisa. “We definitely have the mature customer who remembers what it’s like to either garden themselves or what it tastes like to have fresh corn that was picked that day. They’re going to be great customers indefinitely. But we’re seeing the young people again who want to experience the farm or get that healthful source of food. We’re also seeing the ethnic groups who desire a product that they could get in the old country coming to the farm to see if that’s available.”

In addition to their retail sales, they sell to a select group of other farm marketers who attract different clientele, as well as through a wholesaler to reach other key markets and distribute occasional surplus products. While they do not focus on sales to restaurants, chefs and caterers shop at their market. According to the food consumption data in Ohio MarketMaker, their customer base includes households with a high level of average fruits and vegetables expenditures. The census data in Ohio MarketMaker provides reports on demographic and income information in their census tract (www.ohiomarketmaker.com).



Place

Schacht’s retail market provides a convenient primary sales location for a steady customer base. Pick Your Own customers start and end their visit at the retail market. In addition to their retail farm market, Schachts occasionally provide produce to food banks and sell certain products at auctions in Bainbridge or Mt. Hope.

Promotions & Positioning

(advertising, signage, merchandising, customer relations, public relations, ...)

Schacht Farm Market promotes its market through good road signage, community and media relations, local radio to target markets, listings in various directories, and a prepared staff that sells, sells, sells. In the early years, they tested print ads in weekly community newspapers and direct mail. Now, their primary focus is on working with the media on human interest stories and working with a radio station to attract and update customers on the latest product availability. They also have a phone number with an up-to-date recording telling customers about product availability.



In the future, they plan to use more Internet communications and possibly a loyalty program. Lisa provides customer service training, hands-on training, and an employee manual for all retail employees to prepare them to interact with customers and maintain fresh displays. Lisa handles problem situations directly. The Schachts list their market in a number of free directories, including Ohio MarketMaker, Local Harvest, and pickyourown.org. “Most of our customers find our market through their friends, our road signs, and by driving by and seeing the activity on the farm,” said Lisa. “It’s that taste... that freshness...that enjoyment. When you feel good, you share that.”

Planning & Marketing Management *(challenges, opportunities, priorities)*

Lisa and David handle all of the marketing planning and management. With a focus on freshness, they bring fresh produce into the market throughout the day. “Quality, fresh products and good pricing are important to repeat customers who are loyal to the market,” noted Lisa. “We manage seasonal challenges such as customer relations and personnel management by investing in pre-season activities that quickly prepare staff and customers for the new season.” When asked about advice for other marketers, Lisa suggested, “You don’t have to get real big to be successful. The size and scope of your business will vary based on your goals, strengths and size of your market.”

Marketing Assistance Resources

For help with their marketing, management, and sustainable production practices, the Schachts turn to numerous organizations and programs including Ohio Produce Growers and Markets Association (OPGMA), Ohio Proud, Ohio Farm Bureau/Our Ohio, Ohio MarketMaker, North American Farm Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA), National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association (OEFFA), their local Chamber of Commerce, and various grower groups and publications. They also visit other farm markets and keep an eye on the grocer’s association to learn from other marketers.



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