

## Level One

# Introduction to Using the Internet for Farm Marketing

## Element 1 Why Use the Internet for Farm Marketing?

### Introduction

Discount food retailers are driving out smaller, independent groceries.

These “big box” stores maintain their profits by carrying only the few best-selling (or least expensive) brands, but the “Wal-Mart effect” has also created a backlash of customers who want more options.

Consumers are increasingly looking for local, organic, heirloom, and other specialty foods, as well as levels of customer service that low-cost retailers don’t provide.

People are increasingly comfortable with turning to the Internet to find exactly what they want, thus creating almost as many niches as there are consumers.

Internet markets meet consumer desires for choice and convenience.

Internet marketing allows farmers to reach customers that they could not otherwise have reached without considerable expense. It offers many opportunities for farmers to increase sales, find new markets, and add value to their products. Benefits range from better customer service to reducing the cost of production and distribution.

### Pros

- You don’t necessarily need many computer skills – depending on what you want to accomplish.
- You can do a lot of marketing without even owning a computer, if you have access to the Internet, which you can get free at libraries, small business development centers, and other locations.
- You can put up a listing and a page and have people call, FAX, or write you.
- (Many buyers browse the Internet only for information and prefer to make purchases in person or via phone or FAX.)
- You can increase the visibility of your farm, literally reaching people worldwide.
- You can provide a great deal of information about products.
- You can provide information about yourself and as part of a “virtual relationship” marketing strategy.
- You can find access to markets for farms in remote locations.



## Cons

- Technology can be intimidating.
- Usually, a good understanding of computers and the on-line world is needed.
- Costs can be considerable.
- There are often higher personnel and administrative costs.
- High costs of shipping can price products out of the market.
- Perishable and fragile items are too costly to ship.
- Establishing trust can be difficult.
- It's hard to be noticed when there are literally billions of Web sites.

## Developing a Marketing Plan: What to accomplish by being on the Internet?

Successful enterprises let their marketing strategies determine their Internet marketing approaches – using only the capacities and features of Web marketing that really add value.

There is an Internet marketing option for almost any price range and strategy. However, **the purposes of Internet marketing – attracting buyers, communicating with suppliers, taking orders, etc. – need to be defined before investing in electronic marketing.**

E-mail or a Web site can be an effective way to communicate with customers. Promotions, information, and educating consumers are easy to accomplish with free or low-cost Web sites. Education and information become bonus features of the basic products you sell.

**Meeting consumer's need for information is the MAJOR function of Internet marketing.** You can provide much more information cheaper, faster, and more conveniently on the Internet than by any other means. "Word of mouth" is multiplied by the Internet – a good or bad consumer experience can instantly be communicated to millions.

**Farm-direct marketers are usually selling more than products.** They are selling the **agriculture of social values and a connection to rural life**, so this important aspect of adding-value should not be neglected.

Information and pictures about the farm and the people who live and work there should be included as part of your Internet marketing.

Many farms use e-mail or their Web sites to let customers know when different produce items are available, as well as to provide information about specialty crops and how to prepare and serve them.

**More help in developing a marketing plan is available at**

[www.powerhomebiz.com/vol77/marketplan.htm](http://www.powerhomebiz.com/vol77/marketplan.htm)



## Basic Elements You Need:

A Web presence with a list of products for sale and a way for customers to order, pay for, and receive the products.

## How Producers Are Using the Internet for Farm Marketing

- **Simple E-mail Marketing Example**

Debra Elam is a market gardener near Fayetteville, Arkansas. Her specialty is greenhouse-grown salad mixes. From April through November she sells at a local farmers' market. During the summer, she collected e-mail addresses from customers who said they wanted to continue to purchase salad mix after the market closed.

Ms. Elam's mailing illustrates how she has expanded her market outlets by using the Internet. (Reprinted by permission.)

Subject: Wren Thicket Gardens salad mix  
Date: Mon, 31 Jan 2005 14:41:46 EST  
From: [Wrenthicket@fakeisp.com](mailto:Wrenthicket@fakeisp.com)  
To: [customers@fakee-mailaddress.fake](mailto:customers@fakee-mailaddress.fake)

Hello everybody,

The salad beds in the greenhouse are starting to fill up again so I wanted to let everyone know I will be offering an order/pick-up service until the Farmers' Market starts back up again in April. I will e-mail a list of available products on Monday before the first and third Thursdays in February and March. If you would like to place an order, please e-mail it back to me by Wednesday noon. Pick up will be at the Mill District parking lot (corner of S. School St. and W. Sixth St. in Fayetteville) in front of La Maison Des Tartes from 4:00 to 6:00 PM on Thursday.

**This week I have available:**

1/2 lb. salad mix with edible flowers - \$4.00 bag

Mache - \$2.50 each

"Tom Thumb" butterhead lettuce - 2.50 each

Edible flowers- pansies/violas or assorted mix - \$3.50/clamshell

I grow everything in my greenhouse naturally, without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides -however I am not organically certified. I rinse the greens once after harvesting but recommend that you rinse again before eating. Please let me know along with your order if you would like a reminder e-mail to pick up your order on Thursday.



THANK-YOU so much! I look forward to hearing from you.

Debra Elam

Wren Thicket Gardens

(END of e-mail)

- **E-mail Newsletter Marketing Example**

Newsletters are especially popular with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, and on-farm marketers.

Here is an example of a farm newsletter (reprinted by permission):

MARIQUITA FARM NEWSLETTER Issue Number 179-May 9, 2003

<http://www.mariquita.com>

Table of Contents:

- 1) Featured This Week:
- 2) List of products this week
- 3) Julia's notes
- 4) Eat Me
- 5) Fava U-pick Details
- 6) Photo Links
- 7) Dinner in the Field on May 26, Memorial Day
- 8) Recipes
- 9) About this newsletter
- 10) Weather Link
- 11) Ferry Plaza Farmers Market: Where and When and Where to Park
- 12) Unsubscribe

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1) Featured this Week at Mariquita Farm: Arugula and Sunshine  
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2) This Week at The Mariquita Market Stall:

Vegetables: Arugula, Fava Beans, Spring Garlic, Quelites de Ceniza,

Purple Plum Radishes

Herbs this week: Marjoram, Greek Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, and Thyme  
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3) from Julia: Fava U-pick this Saturday, 12-5. Reply to this e-mail for directions. See Andy's article below for literary details, and facts below that for technical details.

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4) Eat Me?

On the threshold of Wonderland Alice ate from a little cake decorated with currants that spelled out "eat me" and she grew taller. Alice drank from a little bottle labeled "drink me" and she grew smaller. "Curiouser and curiouser," thought Alice, for it seemed as though nothing was impossible any longer. Modern agriculture has fallen down a hole into a weird world, too, and farmers find themselves reaching out for one kind of chemical input to make commercial organisms grow larger and another to make uncommercial life shrink or go away. The chemical industry's most enthusiastic boosters suggest that we all live in a world where nothing is impossible any longer, but whether their products can usher us all into a synthetic wonderland is an topic for debate.

It is true that agricultural yields, measured over a short term in the absence of any full cost accounting, can be shown to have dramatically risen with the introduction of chemical fertilizers and biocides. It is also true that chemical by-products, drifts, and runoffs have contaminated our air, soil, and water resources. Partisans and lobbyists for every perspective around this complex knot of issues wield their statistics like mallets. It's an important controversy, all right; it's about how we feed and clothe ourselves - pretty basic - but I find the arguments depressing, warped, and wonky. I get bored. Besides, as someone who talks too much anyway, I find non-verbal logic more compelling. I invite you to come down to my farm this Saturday and experience the issue the way I do.

As you enter our gate, a three-acre field lies to your right planted out in melons and potatoes. Because the weed pressure is so intense in this field (first year of production!) I've planted the melons right through a sun blocking, black plastic mulch-film. Our farm is alive with beetles that might chew the young melons to death so I've cloaked them in a translucent, permeable, reusable woven fiberglass fabric for their protection. Walk between the silvery white rows and you might see little nettles and quelites popping up. These "weeds" can be read as indicators that point to a soil that is rich and well-drained. Is it any surprise that these plants should themselves be nutritious and tasty to eat? Stoop and touch them. The nettle will sting you and the quelites feel soft as velvet, two polar opposite expressions of vitality. As far as I'm concerned, touch is an argument worth listening to.

Continue past a hedge of elderberry trees just beginning to flower and you will see a small stand of tomatoes. The tomatoes are young and healthy. Inside of two weeks, we will stake them. Breathe deeply. Can you smell the sweet fragrance of the elderblossoms on the breeze? Maybe we are irrigating with kelp on the farm. Can you smell the briny ocean? Pass another elderhedge and you come to planting of 30,000 basil plants, six varieties in all. On a warm day when they are full-grown, you can smell them too. Aroma is an argument that is hard to refute.

Stop and listen. You may hear hawks, crows, quail, or songbirds. If the sun is out you will hear the buzz of bees gathering nectar in the fava patch or flying overhead in the elder flowers. Enter the favas and push your way through the thick stand. You will likely startle a pheasant. The pheasant will likely startle you, too, as it explodes into flight right at your feet. The ancient Chinese said the sound of a pheasant's sudden flight was the awakening of yang, and the opposite of a snake's yin hiss. You'll find little garter snakes on our farm too, if you look. Yin and yang, birds and bees, pheasant and snake: nature's music is beyond logic.

When you get to the end of the fava planting, you have reached the end of our farm. A grassy buffer divides the properties I farm from the neighbor's large conventional tomato field. Scalded by chemical salts, withered by herbicides, and left bare to



erode under winter rains my neighbor's field represents everything distorted about our agriculture. It is anonymous, contaminated, monocultural production under absentee ownership, managed with short-term vision that sees cheapness as the highest value. Eat me?

When I looked today, they were tractoring up the ground to break the cement-like crust that had developed over the winter so they could drill in preplant chemicals. Since these people have no use for crop rotation strategies I'm guessing, their next step will be to transplant tomatoes again. ...and again...until the land is too wasted and riven with disease. Then they'll move on to some other ground. The next lessee will then fumigate in an effort to "control" the pathogens they cultivated with their unbalanced farming practices. If you walk any further, you're trespassing on their land so you might as well turn your back. Maybe this farmer's bank account feels good, smells good, and sounds good, but I wonder.

Looking north again, you'll see tall cover crops swaying in the breeze. Ten lifetimes wouldn't be enough for me to learn all the complex biotic relationships at work in a healthy agricultural ecosystem...or how I as a farmer can best foster them in our present economic climate. Our farm can improve a lot but our favas are beautiful. The elders are beautiful. All of the bugs and critters creeping and crawling and flying are beautiful. Sometimes the crops are beautiful. Shouldn't beauty be an argument? Touch me, smell me, hear me, see me, and if I'm beautiful you'll want to eat me and drink me too. My idea of wonderland is a place where people have an opportunity to know what kind of world they are buying into when they spend their money. So come on down. Pick some favas. Let the kids play hide and go seek in the beans. Enjoy a spring day and keep your eyes open. You just might see a rabbit or a caterpillar on a mushroom.

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5) Fava U-pick this Saturday at our farm in Hollister

Saturday, May 10th from 12 noon to 5pm in Hollister, CA. (About 2 hours or a little less from SF).

First 5 pounds of favas you pick are free, after that, they will be 50 cents a pound. All are welcome.

Andy has inherited a huge cauldron and plans on boiling water in it over a fire so you can make edamame-style favas right there. (Yes, he finally gave up on making fava bean soup for everyone, he would have to put all the crew on shelling the favas the day or two before, and they have too much spring planting to do!) Andy will also have a barbeque going, so you're welcome to bring something to grill. Bring other food to share or to eat on your own, or just come to pick favas and leave, we're flexible. RSVP by replying to this e-mail for directions. Please do this by Friday night; I won't check e-mail after about 7pm Friday until Sunday night or Monday morning. (Andy will likely have a sign out on Saturday afternoon.)

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6) Photo Link

Here's a photo of our arugula bunches. We treat it as a vegetable, not an herb. (the bunches are generous) <http://www.mariquita.com/images/photogallery/arugula.jpg>

And a link to the photo gallery in case you have DSL and time:

<http://www.mariquita.com/images/photogallery/f.html>



7) Dinner in the Field in Watsonville on Memorial Day

On Monday, May 26th, we will have a farm dinner in the middle of the field at High Ground Organics. High Ground is our partner farm in our Community Supported Agriculture program we call Two Small Farms. Joseph Manzare of Globe in San Francisco will prepare an elegant meal, featuring the produce of both our farms. Josh Jensen of Calera Vineyards in Hollister will pour wines to match the courses. Andy of Mariquita and Stephen of High Ground will be there to answer questions about farming; Stephen will give a tour of his unique farm: half is in conservation and wild habitat rehabilitation, the other half is in organic farming, thanks to special easements that will keep the land that way in perpetuity. Stephen's beds of organic flowers and his strawberries should be at their peak.

A portion of the proceeds of this dinner will go to Literacy for Environmental Justice: a non-profit in San Francisco helping connect youth of Hunters Point and other neighborhoods get involved to improve their communities. One project they are working on is getting food into the neighborhood of Hunters Point. Many residents go to convenience stores to purchase food because there isn't much of a grocery store there. One of their projects is to work with these existing convenience stores to carry produce. Some folks from LEJ will join us at the meal and tell us a little more about what they are up to.

Thanks to Larry Bain of Jardinere and Acme Chop House for connecting us up with Cece at Literacy for Environmental Justice.

Details of the meal:

-\$80 includes tax, tip, and wine.

-4pm Monday, May 26th at High Ground Organics in Watsonville.

-Includes farm tour, Calera wines, and a GREAT meal.

-If you're interested, you can e-mail a reply to this newsletter, or call the office at 831.761.3226 and leave a message.

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8) Recipes gathered by Julia

Greens Tacos

This recipe is one of my favorite breakfast recipes, but of course it would work at any time of day. Andy and I ate these this morning. Please note the amounts given are approximate, I don't measure anything when I make these. Serves 2-3

3/4 pounds greens, cleaned well and sliced into approximatel inch pieces (today I used arugula and radish greens, leaving the radish 'roots' in the fridge to be munched on later. the greens are good to eat, but they don't last long!)

2 teaspoons cooking oil

2 stalks green garlic, cleaned as a leek and chopped, or another allium family, whatever you have on hand (onion, green onion, garlic, leek...)

Pinch red pepper flakes or cayenne

2 Tablespoons cream cheese

4-6 small corn tortillas or 2-3 larger flour ones

Heat the oil and add the garlic, having the greens ready to go, and cook garlic for about 30 seconds. Then add greens and cook until bright green and wilted, add red pepper (and salt and black pepper if you like). Take off heat and stir in cream cheese. Heat tortillas, divide filling among them. Eat and enjoy.



ARUGULA PESTO SAUCE (eat with artichokes, noodles, toast, and carrot sticks...)

3 cups packed arugula (about 3/4 pound), washed well and spun dry

1/3 cup pine nuts, toasted golden and cooled

1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 large garlic clove, chopped

3 tablespoons olive oil

1/4 cup hot water plus additional if desired

In a food processor, pulse together all ingredients except oil and water until arugula is chopped fine. With motor running, add oil in a stream, blending mixture until smooth. Sauce may be made up to this point 1 week ahead and chilled, its surface covered with plastic wrap. Bring sauce to room temperature to continue. Stir in 1/4 cup hot water plus additional for thinner consistency if desired.

ARUGULA, MUSHROOM, AND RADISH SALAD

2 large bunches of arugula, coarse stems discarded and the leaves washed well and spun dry (about 8 packed cups)

2 cups thinly sliced mushrooms

1 cup shredded radish

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 1/2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Parmesan curls formed with a vegetable peeler

Combine the arugula, mushrooms, and the radish, drizzle the oil over the salad, and toss the salad gently. Toss with the lemon juice, salt, and pepper to taste, and serve it topped with the Parmesan. Serves 4 to 6. Adapted from Gourmet July 1993

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9) About this newsletter: This is a free weekly e-newsletter put out by Andy Griffin and Julia Wiley, owners of Mariquita Farm. We started this newsletter in 1999 because we saw a demand for information about where and how food is produced, especially sustainably grown food. If you know of folks who would like to subscribe to this e-letter, forward this to them and they can sign up. Thanks. -Julia

<http://www.mariquita.com>

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10) This is the weather link we use:

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/TotalForecast/Monterey/CA006.html>



11) WHERE AND WHEN IS THE FERRY PLAZA FARMERS MARKET?

Every Saturday, rain or shine, 8am-1:30pm at the Ferry Building in San Francisco. This farmers' market is touted as the best in the Bay area for seasonal and local sustainably produced food. Our stall is near the statue of Gandhi. Where to park? Check this link to see a map of parking possibilities:  
<http://www.mariquita.com/Farmers%20Market/parking.htm>

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12) Unsubscribe/Subscribe From/To This Newsletter

We don't want to be anyone's junk mail. Click on this link to subscribe or unsubscribe from this newsletter

(END of newsletter)

- **Third-Party Web Site Listing Examples**

Example: <http://www.buyappalachian.com>

Example: [Local Harvest](#)

Example: <http://www.newfarm.org/farmlocator/index.php>

Example: [Electronic CSA](#)

- **Simple Farm Web Site Examples**

Example: [Maple Spring Gardens](#)

- **Complex Farm Web Sites with On-line Ordering and Payment Examples**

Example: [Baldwin Charolais Beef](#)

