

How to Market Your CSA with Patricia Bishop

Taproot Farm, with owners Patricia Bishop and Josh Oulton, won the Spirit Nova Scotia Local Food Award for 2010 which they share with all the hard working team on their farm. Patricia and Josh have been very successful with their CSA – with over 400 members for 26 weeks; 200 of those go on for the full 52 weeks all developed over a 2yr period.

Patricia addressed a full house audience most of whom either operate a CSA now, or hope to in the near future. “I make all my major marketing decisions at an intuitive level “ said Patricia, “..I don’t have the educational background...it’s all intuitive”.

With that as an opener, Patricia went on to share several successful marketing tips.

She’s interested in promoting the *concept* of CSA (for example: her large bus marketing campaign spring 2011)-- 4 weeks, 12 buses. (\$2000) and has designed her logo with the intent of competing with all the other advertising related to food—not just farms.

There have been miscalculations along the way.... Taproot bought delivery baskets in first year, had their logo put on these, but the cloth baskets are not used extensively now as they’re impractical for stacking and transportation in general.

Via Canada Post, she recently did an 'unaddressed ad-mail' drop (winter 2010) in specific regions --to encourage more clients in her major drop areas to join the Taproot CSA. This is an inexpensive and fairly effective way to get the word out.

Take an Active Role in Community

When Patricia came back from the West several years ago she took an active role in community wherever possible -- rotary, speaking engagements, Chamber of Commerce, Rural Women's group –in an attempt to build connections and network. She recommends this as an essential way to get your farm – and yourself – known in the Community.

When Taproot Farm’s CSA started up Patricia already had a well developed email network and was able to send her brochure throughout her email network and immediately secure a number of Members.

Look in your community as to who is involved with food or sustainability, etc. ---
Make the right connections and asking others to help support, promote, and include information. While you may be reserved in asking for help, Patricia has discovered people are more than happy to help in an area that they have access or are experiences. An effective marketing tactic was purchasing the rights to DIRT, the movie, and showing it (co sponsored) to audiences in 5 communities where the Taproot CSA is available.

Key Factors with respect to marketing Materials

Clear message

Attractive colours

Easy readability

Know what your message is

Marketing CSA's is probably easier in University towns or cities where people are probably reading more about the global food network, and perhaps don't have as much access to farm food.

How do we do CSA in rural areas?

Many people have gardens; however, there are other ways to target the audience.

The All Important Web Site

Even before she had business cards, Patricia put strong emphasis on her website. If someone hears about your farm or CSA, this is the first place they go to find more information.

It's *critical* to have good messaging, easy and clear ideas.

The Taproot Website is continually improving. They now have their blog directly imbedded on their website. (This increases the numbers of hits you get).

When Patricia makes an entry on her Blog, it automatically gets sent to Facebook and Twitter.

They have a Families in Need option --- and offer a New Share Sign up Page

Add-ons are available through the Login on Taproot's website. There, you'll find many options..for example: honey, lamb, chicken.

Importance of Media

Letters to the Editor: Most community newspapers are very interested in having input from community members. You could write a letter every week!! Your name and farm name gets published and you become wider known.

Develop a relationship with the Media -- radio and television. CBC Radio is very interested in young farmers. AVR also. Make a contact list in your email -- and send them regular updates...in press release form.

In Conclusion

What you must do!.....

1. Know what you want and what you need
2. Present yourself well
3. Invest in your marketing/advertising
4. Create a marketing plan: email list, contacts of organizations that might be interesting
5. Take lots of photos!!
6. Do a fridge magnet and a photo book of the farm

Every week Taproot does a Newsletter which is sent electronically to CSA Members.

Do a Survey --!

Taproot's Survey showed that 50% of their membership had incomes over \$90,000. Patricia would like to get the membership down into other groups at lesser income levels. She sees the future as using the CSA model as a model to feed families and children.

Patricia's website design may be available, with all its functionality, for a fee and available on a platform. For this year, Taproot is looking for 5 CSA farms that will work with them as a Pilot project during 2011.

While there is a trend towards all information being available online --- many people still like hard copy promotion elements!! Taproot Farms continues to produce both a rack card and a one sheet on their CSA annually that appeal to people who like to "make decisions with something in their hands".

Monies are available through Farm Investment Fund and other government programs to create Marketing Materials.

