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Expanding E-Commerce Opportunities for Farm-Fresh Markets and Agri-Tourism Industries

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This proposed project is designed to assist farm-fresh market growers, farm retail direct-market operators, and agri-tourism businesses in learning to connect with each other and the consumer by fully utilizing the options available to them for e-commerce on the Internet. In doing so we will be able to enhance the profitability of the fresh-market and agri-tourism industries and assist in streamlining educational delivery methods.

The project proposes to develop a strategic plan that offers a blueprint for how to incorporate a website into the above industries. This will help them utilize the Internet for B2B activities and educate them on how to go about the business of e-commerce. An educational module will be made available via a link in the E-Commerce section of the Agmrc.org website to agri-culturehealth.com, where the educational models will be located. The project will also include a series of webinars. A webinar is a live event that combines educational materials displayed on the Internet with a live telephone conference—comparable to a mini seminar without the need to travel. This also provides an opportunity for participants to ask questions about stages of the launching process for their Internet-business.

Creating an effective website that aligns with and promotes a business's purpose first requires careful thought about the proprietor's business goals and the goals of the website. The project team's deep understanding of farm and related businesses will allow us to guide this thought process and use farm-based examples to illustrate the steps and possible results. We will provide worksheets to facilitate this thought process. The worksheets will cover

various topics such as a calendar of fresh produce availability and special events (such as hayrides, corn maze, etc.), a description of what is offered (retail, wholesale, pick your own), a map to the farm, photos of the family farming, etc. Users will be able to fill in the sections and provide this information to a web designer or cut and paste it into a website-building program.

Our project proposes to use two relatively new and innovative delivery methods: a web-based educational module to be made available via the Internet, and the introduction of this educational module via a webinar that targets the above-named audience.

Objectives

The objectives of the project are to enhance the resources on Agmrc.org by developing a strategic plan that offers a blueprint for incorporating e-commerce strategies into the business of the farm-fresh market grower, retail direct-farm marketer, and agri-tourism business operator. The specific objectives are to provide a primer on how to become involved in B2B e-commerce activities, guidance for e-commerce strategies that support value-added agricultural activities, and webinars and workshops for the purpose of demonstrating the benefits of using online sources to enhance B2B e-commerce.

To accomplish our objectives, the project team will develop an Educational Module that provides guidance on Internet marketing, approaches for e-commerce, and technical guidance for growers and farm marketers in developing their own commercial websites to improve their profitability.

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