The Mid-Atlantic Regional Food System Web Site

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The World Wide Web (WWW) is revolutionizing access to and delivery of information, via timely and easy-to-use interactive multimedia and multi-disciplinary methods. The extension outreach system of land-grant universities can utilize this powerful tool to enhance educational opportunities for food-system professionals and consumers. This three-year project is designed to develop extension education on the WWW around a food-system model to allow delivery of personalized instruction while providing multidisciplinary answers to complex questions. Issues facing the industry are complex, and an effective method of addressing them is needed. Extension education on the WWW developed around a food-system model will allow delivery of personalized instructions while providing multidisciplinary answers, which are not logistically feasible with traditional programming methods. We intent to transform the mode of access to university resources in order to maintain the leadership position of the Land-Grant System in the delivery of research-based and applied information to the citizen of the region.

The site is divided into four areas designed to attract the greatest audience and maximize the value of this effort. These four areas are

1. Agri-Marketing—There are a variety of interest areas, such as Planning a Market, Events of Interest Related to Direct Marketing, Classifieds, and Market of the Month.
2. Local Produce—Where and when to find local products.
3. Food and Health—Results of research related to food and nutrition and education programs.
4. Food Safety—Food safety issues as related to children, consumers, educators, food industry, and recalls.

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Objectives

The overall objective was to design and develop the Mid-Atlantic Regional Food System Web Site, featuring an easily accessible and searchable database of basic and advanced resources. Specific objectives were to 1) provide public and private entrepreneurial access to a database of current and reliable information; 2) provide research information, including case studies on farm, retail, direct, and wholesale marketing; women's health; environmental issues; and food safety; 3) determine methodologies to enhance e-business applications of the food-systems web site, including a searchable map for product offerings, a classified-ads section for product and equipment offerings, a calendar of events, and a retail farm market directory; and 4) develop a continuous evaluation mechanism for feedback for improvement of the food-system web site.

Procedures

The site is designed for agricultural producers/marketers, consumers, and educators. The project was funded by the Kellogg Mid-Atlantic Consortium as one aspect of a comprehensive food-systems approach being developed by 13 member institutions of higher education.

Lessons Learned

1. Hire a knowledgeable webmaster.
2. Map the site.
3. Lay out the graphical design.
4. Register a website in order to establish the site identity on the Internet.
5. Involve all of the principal investigators.
6. Develop an evaluation tool.