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# DIRECT FARM MARKETING AND AGRI-TOURISM IN ARIZONA

*By Joanne Littlefield*

**T**en years ago just a handful of agricultural producers in Arizona were directly marketing their crops and value-added products to the general public. The owners of apple orchards in Cochise County had developed ways to serve consumers through roadside stands, bakeries and restaurants. In Yavapai County, the Young family was refining their operation around sweet corn and pumpkin harvests.

Today, visitors can buy products on-site at farms in nine Arizona counties and on one Indian reservation, thanks in part to an educational program developed by the University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). Faculty in the college have been teaching local growers and ranchers the value of selling their products directly to farm visitors since 1995.

“There are many people who are two or three generations removed from the farm,” says Russ Tronstad, a co-developer of the Direct Farm Marketing Tourism Conference and notebook, and CALs agricultural economist. “They just don’t have an uncle or aunt or grandpa to visit and experience the farm like they used to.”

The range of activities may include taking children to see farm animals, purchasing wholesome, organic food or simply a ride out to the country. Tronstad says educating and entertaining an urban audience is also increasing profitabil-

ity for the holders of valuable land near urban centers. “Producers realize that there’s no profitability in just producing raw commodities so they’ve turned to direct marketing for higher prices in particular.”

He notes that the only way many farmers justify not selling their land for development is if they can fetch prices that are substantially above raw commodity prices for the products and activities that come off their land. Marketing directly to the general public, while not without its hassles, has proven to be a way—for some—to preserve a part of the family farm that has been in the family for generations.

The effort to expand direct farm marketing, or agri-tourism, in Arizona, began more than a decade ago when Julie Leones, a CALs extension economist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, began to quantify the economic impact of agricultural direct marketers in Cochise County through a research survey. Her results were a catalyst for developing the direct farm marketing notebook. This resource, available online, offers Arizona growers information on planning their agri-tourism enterprises.


The educational curriculum was designed to provide producers with an A to Z publication for finding the essentials needed to start and develop a direct farm marketing enterprise. Topics include marketing trends, crop selection, roadside stands, selling to restaurants, value-added items

such as bakery goods, advertising, pricing, legal aspects, and risk assessments.

Along with the notebook, agricultural and resource economics faculty designed and offered the annual Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Conference. Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the event draws interested producers from throughout the Southwest. It draws both regular and new participants who are investigating whether they should try direct farm marketing. Generally 50 to 100 individuals attend the conference, and the notebook has reached thousands of people.

Requests to use the notebook for a short course or class have come from other Western states, Australia, Canada and South Africa. Producers have been able to network and learn from each other at the annual conference by sharing their failures and successes. Last year an Arizona Farmers' Direct Marketing Association was formed so direct marketers could better share ideas and coordinate marketing activities.

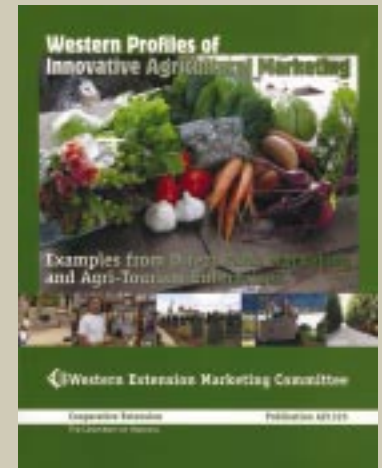
Another direct marketing resource recently made available is *Western Profiles of Innovative Agricultural Marketing: Examples from Direct Farm Marketing and Agri-tourism*.

"This publication examines how several operations in the West have migrated from a traditional commodity-focused business into a successful direct marketing enterprise within the last 10 to 15 years," Tronstad says. "It is not intended to be a step-by-step guide on how to start a direct farm marketing or agri-tourism enterprise, but rather a tool to identify the more subtle and unique factors behind the failures and successes of the enterprises examined, to help farmers determine their strategies for meeting future challenges and risks." 



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### Western Profiles of Innovative Agricultural Marketing: Examples from Direct Farm Marketing and Agri-Tourism Enterprises



Published by the Western Extension Marketing Committee and University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, this book is a collaborative effort with authors from seven western states. The publication identifies the sometimes subtle and unique factors behind the failures and successes of seventeen enterprises located in western urban and rural settings. Using a case study approach, farmers learn concepts that can be applied to stabilize and enhance their businesses, as well as strategies to meet future challenges and risks. Enterprises include a Nevada farm using e-commerce to sell hay to pet owners, a Hawaiian farm marketing processed Kona coffee to Japanese customers through agri-tourism, and Colorado ranchers working as a cooperative to develop a market for "natural" beef. Contents of the 122-page color publication are available as free downloads at [cals.arizona.edu/arec/wemc/westernprofiles.html](https://cals.arizona.edu/arec/wemc/westernprofiles.html). Printed copies may be purchased online for \$10.00 at [cals.arizona.edu/calsmart](https://cals.arizona.edu/calsmart).

Russ Tronstad addresses local producers at an agri-tourism conference.



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Resources: The Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism notebook is available online at <https://cals.arizona.edu/AREC/pubs/pubs.html>. For more information contact Russ Tronstad, (520) 621-2425, [tronstad@ag.arizona.edu](mailto:tronstad@ag.arizona.edu).