

How to Direct Market Your Beef by Jan Holder

Book Summary and Review

Summary

Starting Out

It's important to find a niche that makes your beef unique.

One difficulty with selling beef is that some cuts are in higher demand than others. You will need to balance your sales and find ways to sell all your beef.

How much beef can you expect from live weight to boxed weight? The authors suggest 30% of live weight. Keep records so you know your actual yields.

When you are starting out it's important to take things slow and make "\$10 mistakes, not \$1,000 dollar mistakes".

After you calculate the price you need to be profitable, stick to your price. Not everyone is your target market. Pricing your beef too low can make it less desirable as it is not seen as a premium product.

Chef's don't want frozen beef. You will need to find a way to deliver fresh to them if you plan to sell to restaurants.

If you are selling to stores and restaurants you must find a way to deliver your product consistently. They will not accept you missing a shipment, being late, or running short.

Frozen beef is more flexible as it allows you to finish your animals around the same time of year and then sell throughout the year.

It's important that you learn how to cook your beef and help educate your customers on how to cook it as well. Distributing recipes for each cut of beef is a great idea.

Finding a processing facility is an important part of the process. Contact your state's Department of Agriculture to get a list of processing facilities. You can then begin to investigate the options each facility offers, quality, and pricing.

When deciding how to package your product, consider who your customers are and how they would like it to be packaged. For example, most retail consumers prefer 1 pound packages of ground beef for convenience.

If you are selling to stores, restaurants or farmers markets you may need to carry liability insurance. This is not difficult to get.

When choosing a breed of cattle you will notice that all the breeds seem to be marketed as great at everything. They're not. Some are better at some aspects than others. The genetics within a breed are also important. A few breeds that tend to marble well are Angus, Jersey, Hereford, Red Angus, Highlanders, Murry Grey, Tarantaise.

You will not get marbling in your cattle until they reach a certain age. The authors mention that they are targeting animals that will mature in two years or less and are 800 to 1,000 pounds at maturity.

Dr. Dick Driven says "When your steer reaches 60 percent of its mature body weight, it will be at a point in its development where it grows intramuscular fat (marbling) cells or connective tissue (gristle). If your steer is on an upward plane of nutrition (gaining weight), it will form marbling cells. If not, it will form connective tissue. This is one reason you can't look at a fat steer ready for slaughter and predict if he'll marble well."

Selling Product

One of the most important things you must do initially is to analyze your strengths and weaknesses. This can be time consuming.

Analyze your team, your physical resources, your location, your economics, and any other supporting resources. This will determine where you should focus on selling your beef and how.

There are several sales outlets listed: restaurants, stores, farmer's markets and mail order.

Restaurants are very price conscious because of their slim margins. You will need to focus on higher end restaurants. Keep in mind that restaurants want fresh beef and consistent delivery.

Stores are very conscious of price and concerned about their bottom line. You will need to ask them details about how you should deliver beef to them.

Distributors move much more product. These are probably more suited to you if you have a lot of beef.

Farmer's Markets can be a good option for selling product. You may need to drive to a nearby large city and every city varies in demand for your product. If one market is not

working, try another one. If you want to learn what you need to do to sell at a farmer's market, check with another vendor or the market manager.

Mail order can be a difficult sales outlet. You must keep the beef cold and pay for shipping which can quickly become very expensive. If you have larger volumes of beef you can probably get discounted shipping rates.

Marketing your product is extremely important for the small producer who is selling direct. When contacting restaurants, stores and distributors you will have to be prepared with all your information before calling. Research each business before you meet with them. Make sure you bring your promotional materials, samples and a proposal with you to your sit down meeting with each client. Mail a letter after your meeting to thank them for the meeting. Follow up with them several days later. When you are turned down, always ask why so you can learn for the next time.

When you are naming your farm, creating your logo and promotional material, keep it simple.

A simple tri-fold brochure telling more about your farm is a great idea. Don't put prices in this brochure or you will have to frequently reprint it.

In any advertising remember to include 2 things: What is the benefit to the customer and what do you want them to do?

When deciding where to advertise remember this: Only focus on people who can buy and are interested in your product. This is your target market. Don't waste time and money on people who are unlikely to buy.

If you contact your local paper you can probably receive some free PR. Let them know when you are doing something interesting and unique.

Seek out groups to speak to if they are likely to be interested in your product.

Focus on advertising that is narrowly focused on your target market. Ignore advertising that is more general in nature like TV, radio, etc.

Consider listing your business in directories of healthy food like localharvest.org or eatwild.com

Growing Profit

Keep good financial records so you can make better, more profitable decisions. The healthy food market is growing quickly. Take it slow when taking on new clients and sales channels. Make sure things are running smoothly before adding something new.

Consider these factors that affect your profitability: Production costs, Processing costs, Market requirements, Carcass yields, Storage and obsolescence risk, Management skills.

Review

How to Direct Market Your Beef was a good book to get an overview of how to direct market beef. I found the information to be a little scattered and disorganized, but there was some very important and helpful information I learned. The book definitely gives some good ideas and things to keep in mind.

I found the book to be a little discouraging as it is very honest about the difficulties in direct marketing your beef. However, it is helpful to know the things which are difficult, rather than trying to direct market to certain channels and realize their requirement later. One example of this would be that restaurants want fresh beef. This is a very important piece of information to know for someone interested in marketing to restaurants. It changes your production methods, processing schedule, delivery requirements and more.

Overall, I would recommend reading this book. I would not consider this book comprehensive on the subject. It's a quick read and has some very valuable information.

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About Josiah Garber (creator of this book summary)

Josiah first became interested in nutrition for health and healing. He started farming to produce the healthiest food for his family and now for everyone! Follow his journey at www.thefarmingpodcast.com or visit his farm website at www.fireflymeadowfarm.com

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