

Session 2: Label, Label, What's on the table?

Panelists: Vicki Zilke, Randy Hampshire, and Brian Bates

All panelists are farmers, the following is their specialties.

Vicki: Produce farmer

Brian: Organic veggie farmer, small scale – large reach

Randy: Dairy, grains, and veggies

VZ: Farmer since 2011, promote health and healthy food access

- Branding is important
 - Logo development and brand as “local”
 - Slogan “Locally grown by farmers you know”
 - Points of sales: Road side stand has helped increase sales
 - Location, location, location!!! Super important
 - Labeling is a big deal
 - Make sure everyone knows you (be the face of your business)
 - Partner with local institutions that support local farmers
 - They are GAP (Good Agriculture Practices) certified for 3 years now and USDA certified
 - The most important thing about being food safe is write it down. If it isn't written down or recorded then it didn't happen. Create log books to help record everything.
 - They have hoop houses, 250 egg laying chickens and attend the Ypsilanti Farmer's Market twice a week.
 - They partner with work places to set up a “farmer's market” to bring produce and goods to businesses during their lunch hour for better access for the work places.
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BB: Brian and his wife own Bear Creek Organic Farm, est. 2013

- They are not yet GAP certified but are USDA organic certified.
- Smaller farm that sits in a valley
- They do not have a store front on location but many people think they do and come to visit the farm and are welcomed to the cleanliness of their wash room.

Branding:

- have a clear and concise plan
- brand yourself (t-shirts, logos, be the face of the business)
- For the market booth, have big bold thoughts and color appeal
- Banner on the truck
- have a social media presence
 - Full transparency farming
 - People feel connect to the farmer and to where their produce is coming from

Packaging:

- Packaging is so important

- They use bar codes which they have purchased to make the sales reporting seamless.
 - Packaged in recycled plastic (make the packaging look like how big box retailers sell)
 - o Open air packaging is hard to transport
 - Label: says “locally grown”, USDA organic seal, eye catching with color and play on words, promote squeaky clean 3x washed.
 - Buying experience to be seamless for buyers, goal to make it easy to purchase
 - Logo is sunflower
 - 2 main fonts (no more)
 - give breathing room
 - Certification regulates where and how labels look
 - little details like font/spacing matters
 - Come up with creative names “tomato medley” is a good market technique
 - Dress up your product in a tux.... You have worked so hard to make so, take it to the next level.
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RH: Owns Hampshire Farms

- Has a long family history of farming that can be dated back to 1800’s
 - Hampshire Farms has been in operation since 1988, has over 250 acres, 2 farm locations
 - Certified organic and bioargo
 - Large dairy farmer: heifers and jersey cows
 - Has an Agriculture production degree from MSU
 - Produces grains: hard red winter wheat, rye, and buck wheat corn, beans, 1000+ egg layers, 1000 + meat chickens
 - Full licensed kitchen on the farm with fire wood oven
 - They make breads, cookies and gluten free flours and baked goods

 - Have been attending the Royal Oaks Farmer’s Market for over 20 years
 - They sell grains, flours, baked goods, produce, eggs, and meats
 - cheeses, butter, milk

 - Partnered with large manufactures to sell grains and soy beans
 - Sat on the 1st organic farmers board in MI
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Q & A:

Panelists asked to answer based on their farming practices, (the following)

VZ: Locally grown farming
RH: Biodynamic farming
BB: Certified Organic Farming

Q1: Why did you branch out into your farming specialties?

BB: There was not any Organic Farmer locally so they wanted to be the 1st.

- Brian studied organics at Penn State
- Cost sharing helped to become certified
- Transparency with pricing was important to him
- customer grocery co-op to have policy to bring in organics
- many laws protect organics: organics is a legally binding work and must be certified to use it
- local produce department made the efforts to only sell certified organics
 - carries weight for market base

Q: What does it mean to be certified organic?

BB: One annual inspection

- Limitation to some things you can use such as fertilizer and pesticides
- They already used many of the strategies so moving over to organic farming was no big change for them
- Have a good relationship with your certifier
- There is no Michigan based certifying agency
- Shop around for a good certifier
- Many other local farmers have now also gone organic.

Vicki: (why she focused on local)

- Started as a CSA
- Is not certified organic by choice.
- Build customer base by knowing the people (lived in the area for over 20 years so already knew a lot of local people)
- Capitalize on local movement
- Be the face of your farm
 - o Transparency is key
- Local shared definition
 - State of MI and adjacent counties
 - source identified
- years ago UM reached out to provide healthy food, they deliver 3 times per week to different sites to sell at businesses
- There is a local blogger that loves to follow their farm and praises their farm on a social media platform.

Randy: First got exposed to organics in the 80's

- Went to Canada and learned about biodynamics

- Learned about special sprays, fertilizers to do biodynamics
- Is certified MI organic
- OCIA dual certified
- Steller USDA Demeter

Q: What is the difference between Biodynamics and organic?

Randy:

- Relationships play a huge part of how certifications get done.
- Sales are ½ Farmer's market and ½ row crops

Brian:

- Same ½ Farmer's market and ½ whole sales
- Brian is the only full time employee
- Have to be physically at the Farmer's market to make money.
- Don't take Farmer's market for granted – make the effort

Open Questions:

For Brian: What is the importance of bar codes?

BB: To have an all unique one main organization that controls the Bar Codes

- QS1 administers the bar codes
- list of bar codes (you assign the codes to your own product)
- roll on stream sales report
- produce PLU codes is slower at check out
- Bar codes make everything scan
- Bar codes has their own list to make it easy for generating sales reports
- makes it unique to the seller
- able to see which product was sold as they are not batched together with other products
- makes it easier for sellers
- \$100 per year, to start there is a \$200 to \$300 startup fee to QS1

Q: As a consumer of organics, how do you know if the product is actually organic certified or not?

RH: The label will say "USDA organic"

- Laws are in place to make certified
- USDA will regulate

BB: Report fraud to USDA – there is no longer any gray areas with the laws

- Can say, "Made with organic oats"

RH: Raw milk is illegal to sell

- Cow sharing means you pay for a farmer to manage a cow and you can then get the milk raw.

BB: Local washing: always ask where food is coming from; call them out when you find fraud

Q: Consumer say organic, what does that mean to my health benefits?

RH: In the early 90's there was a one-page flyer called, what is organic? Now the government mandates it

BB: Health benefits are not part of the law

There is a long list of prohibited items that cannot be used on the farm

- It matters what is in the sprayer
- Stay away from the dirty dozen chemicals
- Screening for pesticides at sale
- Fertility has to be organic
- Source of natural means

VZ: not a certified organic farmer by choice

- Far more important for people to learn more about eating healthy and better quality of food.