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RRRC

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Baseline Research for a Local Food Marketing and Awareness Campaign

1. Background

This document serves as a foundational research baseline for RRR Commission's goal of creating a Local Food Marketing Plan as outlined in the organization's 2015 "Rappahannock-Rapidan Farm & Food Plan." The document covers key references, a draft local food marketing toolkit, and identifies successful attributes of local food system marketing and awareness campaigns.

2. Aspects of a Local Food Marketing Toolkit

Nearly all local food marketing information is based direct-to-consumer strategies for farmers seeking to diversity their customer base. Information regarding actual marketing strategies or campaigns for local government scattered. Characterizing the marketing plan instead as "consumer education" or "consumer awareness" was more beneficial for research.

One specific guide, developed by Community Involved in Sustainable Agriculture (CISA), based in western Connecticut, created a local food marketing toolkit for localities in 2001 titled, "Harvesting Support For Locally Grown Food: Lessons Learned from the Be a Hero, Buy Local Campaign." The Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown campaign, launched in 1999, is the nation's longest-running agricultural "buy local" program. Despite the publication date, the principles remain pertinent.

While no other toolkits of were found, local food marketing and branding efforts were cross-referenced with the CISA document, baseline marketing literature, the book *Destination Branding for Small Cities* by Bill Baker, and other pertinent local food awareness campaigns, the most helpful being Denver's Foodshed, The Wisconsin Local Food Marketing Guide, and Growing a Local Food Economy in North Carolina, and Vermont's farm-to-plate network.

A draft local food marketing toolkit is outlined below.

2.1 Objectives (Define goals and align purpose)

To initiate a successful and effective communications effort, start with an assessment of your current program goals. Examine what your program stands for—its mission and values. Look closely at who your program is serving. This process will help narrow and sharpen the focus for your communications initiative(s).

- Define goals
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Create a long-term strategy to include milestones and a timeline

2.2 Partnerships (establish stakeholders)

Groups, organizations, or businesses may exist that would aid you in reaching your goal by providing funds, expertise, support, or other resources. List allies or partners who support or work with your audiences or share in your goals.

- Identify specific stakeholders
- Farmers (Make goals compatible with farmers, start with farmers you know, understand what motivates farmers, offer farmers benefits even if they don't actively participate, streamline membership participation efforts)
- Organizations (non-profits, restaurants, institutions, etc.)
- Develop shared expectations (potential benefits, fees, policies)

2.3 Funding

- Grants
- Program fees
- Donors
- Retail fundraising
- Sponsorships
- Volunteers

2.4 Market research (identify audience)

This kind of background information is essential in choosing the most effective ways to communicate with the audience.

- Market segmentation (Demographics, shopping habits, motivations, barriers primary and secondary influencers, are multiple messages needed for the focus area can there be more consistent messages? most popular media outlets, which messengers would be most compelling to the audience?)
- Define target audience (understand the consumer base)

2.5 Message Development (logo and slogan development)

- The messaging is closely tied to the goal and objectives. It should:
 - Show the importance, urgency, or magnitude of the issue
 - Show the relevance of the issue
 - Put a “face” on the issue
 - Be tied to specific values, beliefs, or interests of the audience
 - Reflect an understanding of what would motivate the audience to think, feel, or act
 - Be culturally competent
 - Be memorable
- Determine effective messaging:
 - Locally grown food is safer

- Locally grown food is fresher
- Buying locally grown food helps the environment
- Buying locally grown food preserves farmland
- Buying locally grown food helps your neighbor
- Buying locally grown food helps the economy
- Buying locally grown food supports a better future for your children

2.6 Message Communication (message tools)

- What is the message phrasing?
- What are the message tactics (10 – dollar a week, farmers market dollars, events, etc.)
- What are some of most effective channels for reaching the audiences? Point-of-purchase, media (newspaper, online, radio), posters, farm products guides, PSAs, mascots and costumes, swag (shirts, bumper stickers, totes, hats, aprons, cups)
- Where does the audience get information
- Who is credible?
- Where do they spend the most time?
- Where can you get most of their attention?

2.7 Implementation

- List all activities
- Under each activity, outline the steps, in order, that will lead to its completion
- Assign a budget estimate to each step
- Assign a staffing needs estimate to each step
- Working backwards from the activity completion point, assign a date for each step

2.8 Evaluation

- Were objectives met?
- What is the rate of return on investment?
- Measure preference and purchasing behavior
- Tracking of internet and foot traffic

3. Successful attributes of local food system marketing and awareness campaigns

Many local food system initiatives detail how a general lack of awareness is a formidable barrier to promoting and creating demand for local food. This section provides a summary of the reoccurring attributes found in local food consumer awareness campaigns.

3.1 Consider creating a Marketing Working Group

Many of the local food system awareness initiatives designated specific working group to study and implement marketing campaigns. For instance, Vermont’s Farm to Plate initiative has a Consumer Education and Marketing Working Group focused on “strategies which improve the display and marketing of local and regional food, greater consumer awareness about the importance of these, and which expand culinary and agricultural tourism opportunities.”

3.2 Co-op preexisting community initiatives to build coalitions and save time.

In order to achieve buy-in and maintain support for local food systems activities from a broader range of stakeholders, efforts should be communicated and framed as aligning with as many community goals as possible. For instance, a local food campaign in North Carolina aligned its marketing strategies and positioned local food with programs that already were promoting economic development, public health, environmental sustainability, and equity.

3.3 One consistent, over-arching brand is essential for consistency and recall, and branding and marketing are not separate processes but co-dependent

While the RRRC “Farm & Food Plan” wants to target multiple market segments through different messaging and contemplates the eventual creation of a unified brand, marketing literature is clear in highlighting the importance of having a disciplined adherence to consistent messaging through the creation of a holistic, long-term brand. Additionally, every local food marketing campaign examined was supported by a brand.

As a result, branding should be developed *before* the first phase of marketing implementation to establish long-term consistency and create a cumulative effect on consumer recall of a campaign’s values. Conversely, tailored messaging to multiple market segments risks being duplicitous, uncoordinated, and unaligned in absence of an overarching brand architecture.

3.4 Focus groups may be beneficial to establishing which messaging is the most effective and to avoid creating different messages for different groups.

While RRRC has conducted extensive analysis in the past concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the local food system, it appears that further research may be needed to identify how to position potential marketing messaging. For instance, after conducting marketing research, CISA was able to focus its campaign around two topics: “Buying locally grown food contributes to the economy” and “When you buy locally grown food, you are supporting your neighbors.” As a result, CISA streamlined the marketing process and used only two messages to multiple target markets instead of different messaging for each individual group.

Conversely, CISA found people were not convinced that buying locally grown helps the environment or preserve agriculture and found that the chief barrier to messaging was the belief that buying local food was “inconvenient.” While it may be likely that RRRC’s region may have similar sentiments, and informed assumptions can be made from the “Food & Farm” report, consumer focus groups may provide more focused messaging and ultimately save time and money.

3.5 Be inclusive and look beyond jurisdictional and geographic boundaries when thinking about available resources and potential benefit.

RRRC’s “Food & Farm Plan” says ultimately that the region’s definition of “local food” goes beyond the Commission’s five-county area and extends south to Charlottesville and north

to Arlington. Many successful marketing campaigns extend outside their production region to increase scope and effectiveness. This expanded definition of “local food” may help in messaging efforts.

3.6 Point-of-sale marketing may be the most effective food system advertising.

It appears that point-of-sale advertising is most effective in promoting local food systems. Social media, newspaper ads, bumper stickers are also effective. Farm guides cataloguing local businesses and promotional events tend to be less effective.

3.7 Identify an existing story and construct how it will be told through local food.

Central to food marketing is leveraging local cultural heritage that appeals to local pride and identity. For instance, in Louisville, the local food system awareness campaign focused on linking the food system with the bourbon industry. By educating consumers on craft processes, local distillers gave value to products that have a cultural connection to the region and increase consumer awareness of the entire food system.

3.8 Consider low-cost initiatives

A North Carolina initiative began a “Eat, Drink, and Be Local” awareness week that was created by a county employee who asked restaurants to feature local foods for a week. The event kicked off an ongoing branding campaign. The logo that was used was designed for free by a local graphic designer. Since the event, the logo has been used on marketing materials for other local food events.

4. Next steps for further research

- Focus on state-level marketing initiatives and provide relevant case studies for evaluation of possible tools and tactics that can be implemented in Step 6 (messaging communication) of the Marketing Toolkit by contacting local organizations such as PEC
- Further define phasing and long-term strategies
- Focus on low-cost initiatives first
- Refine demographic information and market segmentation