

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Increasing farm sales and success by building digital marketing skills

AT A GLANCE

The **Building a Marketing Strategy for Your Small Farm** workshop teaches producers how to apply digital marketing strategies that attract customers, help grow their businesses and increase farm sales.

The Situation

Idaho has more than 25,000 farms, many of which are small and mid-size operations that sell their products direct to consumers and through intermediated markets like restaurants and grocery stores. Effective marketing is a critical factor in the success of small, diversified farms and an ever-growing virtual landscape has made effective digital marketing more important than ever. Successful marketing strategies strengthen producer relationships, build customer bases, and increase sales of agricultural and value-added products.

Small farm and food system program evaluations have consistently demonstrated producers' interest in and need for skills that allow them to develop and maintain customer relationships, especially for new and beginning farmers and ranchers; create and manage social media marketing platforms including farm or ranch websites, Instagram and Facebook pages; access new direct and intermediated markets; and increase sales.

Our Response

Idaho Cultivating Success™ and Emily Black, an experienced farmer and marketing consultant, co-developed a four-week live virtual workshop to increase producers' understanding and use of digital marketing.



Photo by Emily Black, Lone Mountain Farms & Brewery and Cultivating Your Market.

Building a Marketing Strategy for Your Small Farm was designed to guide farmers, ranchers and local food business owners in developing personalized marketing strategies to help them grow their business and sell their products. Each week focused on a key digital marketing strategy: messaging, websites, social media and email communication. The workshop helped participants develop a clear and motivating marketing message, identify tools to help them connect with their customers and build a holistic marketing strategy.

The curriculum was designed using performance-based learning, a skills-based adult learning model that integrates instruction on key concepts with group-based skill building activities. The workshop was offered in an eight-part format that included four

Saturday morning class sessions (90 minutes each) that introduced the concepts and skill building activities for that week and four Wednesday evening group coaching sessions (90 minutes each) that used group discussions and moderated breakout groups to practice applying concepts and develop skills. Throughout the workshop producers assessed their current marketing, examined new marketing strategies, and adapted those strategies to fit their business and meet their goals. Participants who attended all four Saturday and Wednesday sessions, completed the weekly homework and the end of workshop evaluation were eligible for one hour of free one-on-one coaching with co-instructor Emily Black. The development and offerings of this workshop were supported by a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant Award # 2019-49400-30034.

Program Outcomes

Building a Marketing Strategy for Your Small Farm was offered in February 2022 and again in February 2023. The workshop had a significant impact on the success of new and beginning farmers or ranchers. Multiple participants reported increased farm sales after applying the concepts and skills covered in the workshop, and a few participants sold out of their products entirely. Participants shared these statements about the workshop:

- “I liked the structure of having the lesson, homework and then the breakout sessions. Being so remote, I really enjoyed each opportunity to meet and connect with other farmers in breakout sessions.”
- "Sharing each of our statements and stories helped me to see how important they are to express what I want to come across to my customers in a clear and concise way."

- “Working with and learning from Emily has increased my confidence with social media and marketing greatly.”

Other program outcomes include increases in participants’ knowledge on workshop topics and preparedness to continue refining their messaging, set and meet digital marketing goals, and track various marketing metrics.

Participant Preparedness to Continue Working on Key Digital Marketing Tasks

Tasks	Very Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Not Prepared
Identifying your customer’s needs	62%	38%	0%
Crafting your story	71%	29%	0%
Refining your positioning statement	76%	24%	0%
Developing unique messaging	59%	41%	0%
Creating customer calls to action	53%	47%	0%
Setting digital marketing goals	59%	41%	0%

The workshop emphasized the importance of developing and regularly refining a positioning statement, a brief description of a product or service and explanation of how it meets a customer’s needs, to increase sales and grow a farm business. All participants reported feeling very or somewhat prepared to continue working on these key digital marketing tasks after the workshop.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Colette DePhelps, Area Extension Educator Community Food Systems • University of Idaho Extension • 208-885-4003 • cdephelps@uidaho.edu

Mackenzie Lawrence, Administrative Coordinator Community Food Systems • University of Idaho Extension • mlawrence@uidaho.edu

Emily Black, Owner/Co-Founder and Marketing Coach & Consultant Lone Mountain Farms & Brewery and Cultivating Your Market • 208-597-6086 • emily@cultivatingyourmarket.com

54-23-cdephelps-digital-marketing • 10/23