

# **Graves Farm & Garden**

## **On-Site Report**

### **Production Overview:**

Thirty-acre garden that grows product for the farm stand and for wholesale clients. Crops grown include: watermelons, cantaloupes, onions, squash, sweet corn, okra, zucchini, bell peppers, tomatoes, black eyed peas, egg plant, green beans, honey dew, cucumbers, jalapenos, many varieties of red, green and yellow peppers, pumpkins, dill, ornamental corn, pimientos.

Additional farm acreage includes 120 acres to grow contract chile for processing, 60 acres of alfalfa and 100 acres of feed silage.

### **Farm Market Overview:**

Open from July – November selling all homegrown produce grown on the farm. Product sold in small air-conditioned retail stand with most products displayed from refrigerated cases. Chiles roasted fresh while the customer waits. Prices in the farm stand are very low compared to the local Roswell Farmers' Market. In some cases production and harvesting costs per pound actually exceed the retail price charged per pound.

### **Customer Base:**

Lower income adults and generally an older audience. Purchases are typically less than \$5.00 per customer with a large portion of the clientele using the EBT card.

### **Location:**

Convenient to the city of Roswell and other surrounding smaller communities with easy accessibility from the major roads.

### **Immediate goals for increasing revenue:**

- **Attract more customers**
- **Present a more professional market**
- **Increase the average customer sale**
- **Expand the retail enterprises**

## **CUSTOMER APPROACH TO FARM & MARKET**

Your directional road signs are freshly painted and make a good appearance, however the specific seasonal crop signs are in poor condition and not professional.

### **Recommendations:**

- Using supplemental signs to advertise a specific crop are a good idea as long as they are put up and taken down, as the crops are available. On the day I visited your farm the Sweet Corn sign was left up all day and no corn was available in the stand. Leaving them up when the crop is not available in the farm stand will only annoy and irritate the customers that drive to you for that product.

Driving on to your property looks like you are entering a junkyard of old vehicles and farm equipment.

### **Recommendations:**

- Remove all of the old cars, trucks, farm vehicles and junk to the left of the market to make a positive first impression and create a parking lot for your market.
- Obtain from the New Mexico Dept. of Ag one or two of their banners that say, "Taste the Tradition" and place one at the entrance to your farm and one outside of your farm stand or on the back wall inside the store.
- Utilize this open space for special events and festivals that can bring you more customers and revenues. Specific ideas for event marketing will be addressed later in the proposal.

Your farm stand building is hidden from view when driving onto your property.

**Recommendations:**

- Prune back the peach trees in order to have a better view of your farm stand.
- Put up signs or barriers to prevent cars from parking in front of the trees, which obscures the vision of your market.

Improve the outside of your farm stand to make a positive impression.

**Recommendations:**

- Expand the grassy area in front of the market with planters and more attractive landscaping. Keep the grass cut.
- Get rid of the garage sale table of merchandise or move to the side of the stand. This does not make a positive first impression or convey that quality products will be sold inside.
- Place some of your old farm implements in front of and to the side of the stand. Make computer signs, laminate and mount on these implements to explain how they were used on the farm. This can become an educational element for your guests and families.

## **FARM STAND**

You are not charging enough for your product. Pricing is substantially below the Roswell Farmers' Market and your quality is better.

### **Recommendations:**

- Raise the price of your products and your average sale will automatically increase. There is no reason to be so dramatically lower in your prices from the local supermarkets. *Your quality and freshness are superior.*
- A closer review of your planting and harvesting costs by crop will also assist you in pricing the product for a profit.
- At the start of each homegrown crop, regularly go and price your local markets.
- As a producer you have a right to make a profit and feed your family. Set your margins accordingly. (Don't let Buzz set the prices.)
- The pricing for both your bushel chiles and Ristras are below your competition and market value. Raise these prices.
- Your mail order pricing does not need to be same as your pricing in the store. Mail order pricing is generally higher. (A search of the Internet shippers showed chiles ship for up to \$40.00 a bushel – you charge \$9.95. Ristras are sold online for up to \$15.00 a foot – you charge \$5.00.) Don't undervalue your products.

Your farm stand has a good selection of homegrown produce that is generally well displayed and of good quality however your average sale is less than \$5.00 per person.

### **Recommendations:**

- The best technique to sell more produce products is to offer samples. You should always have a plate of small cut pieces of cantaloupe, watermelon and other produce easy to pick up with your fingers and eat. **SAMPLING SELLS!** Use it to your advantage *every day*.
- When cutting the product and preparing sample trays in front of the public be sure you have clean hands, use a clean knife and see that the area

appears sanitary. You will also want to cover trays/plates with a plastic wrap to protect from the flies.

- The rear of your store is not well lit and would be greatly improved by adding some track lighting over the produce cases both on the side and back wall. It has been proven in produce departments that by adding direct track lighting to product displays you will sell more produce.
- Increase your average sale by adding more jars of processed merchandise. This merchandise can be displayed on the shelves above the front refrigerated case, to the left of the entrance and the shelf with the honey. New Mexico processed products would be desired. Once I visit the New Mexico Dept of Ag Country Market tent at the State Fair I hope to be able to give you some specific vendors and product ideas. (EX. Salad dressings, syrups, jams, jellies and pepper products.) Sampling will also help to sell these products.
- While the store and floor generally appeared tidy, the shelving with the honey was very dusty and didn't make that product look very inviting. All shelves should be dusted daily.
- The counter area and wall behind the checkout stand was cluttered. Try to do some housekeeping to give a better visual impression to the customers. Go around the front of the counter yourself and view your checkout area as a customer. The walls may need to be painted, etc.
- Product lettering and signage could look more professional. Assign the person with the neatest printing to letter your signs. The New Mexico Dept of Ag offers several sizes of cardboard signs with the "Taste the Tradition" logo. You can add your own pricing and product description to the sign. This would provide a more consistent look and reinforce the New Mexico-grown product.
- You have a real problem with flies and may need to spray heavily each night as you close the store. It is a turnoff to a customer to see a lot of flies around their produce.
- You appear to have an older clientele on a limited budget. You might want to try selling half watermelons and half cantaloupes covered with plastic wrap as a convenience to seniors. By cutting the product in half the customer can see the inside of the product, which creates an impulse purchase. Offering convenience packaging often increases the average sale versus decrease the sale. More often you pick up a sale that would never have occurred. The total pricing of product cut in half is greater than if it is sold as a whole melon. (These products would need to be sold out of your refrigerated cases.)

It appeared to me that you were sorting out a high percentage of distressed products.

- A technique to hold product longer over night is to cover the refrigerated product with chilled and dampened gunnysacks. Store the gunnysacks in water in plastic buckets and keep in your cooler during the day. At closing, wring out the gunnysacks and cover the produce to help the product retain moisture. Frequent water misting of produce in refrigerated display cases is another technique to hold the product longer.

### **CHILE ROASTING AREA**

You mentioned that you would like the customer to go outside while their chiles are being roasted, to keep down crowding in the farm stand.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The outside area did not appear that it was available to the customer. It looked more like an employee lunch area. Add an overhead sign saying, “Watch your chiles being roasted!”
- Make the space more defined and attractive with a planter, corn stalks around the posts etc.
- This is a very dusty area. The tables and chairs should be wiped off daily to make it appealing for a customer to sit down. The roasting area should be swept daily and appear clean. As this is a food processing area, be very mindful of how the customer views your handling of the product.

### **ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES**

Evaluate the effectiveness of the money spent on your current marketing, advertising and farm promotions through newspaper and radio. You are spending a considerable amount of money on a variety of advertising medium for your store sales and size of community. You might be able to have just as good of sales with fewer media used. Evaluation of the media is important to do.

#### **Recommendations:**

- You currently advertise in the Roswell Daily News, The Thrifty Nickel and The Shopper, but have no way of knowing what paper is working for you.

Enclosed is a template for a newspaper ad that will assist you to measure newspaper effectiveness through a promotional coupon plus an approach that will attract a new first-time buyer.

BUY 2 Cantaloupes - GET ONE FREE

OR

PURCHASE \$10.00 HOMEGROWN PRODUCE

Get a FREE WATERMELON

This offer can be changed on a weekly basis to identify product that is in great abundance at the time.

- Only use a map in your ad if it is readable.
- All coupons should have an expiration date one week from insertion.
- Since the Thrifty Nickel and The Shopper are so similar you may find that advertising in just one is enough or advertise in them alternate weeks. Then you will be able to track sales by week to see if one or the other papers brings more customers to your farm.
- All coupons should have a small code in the corner to identify the newspaper and date so you can record and measure the response per paper.

(See sample RDN 9/8)

- Record and tally redemption of coupons so you can begin to measure the effectiveness of the print media.
- Similar offers can also be made via radio for the customer to mention the offer as mentioned on the particular radio station to measure the effectiveness.
- You use three radio stations including a Spanish language station. I would need to know more about these stations and when your commercials air to provide a complete evaluation of your radio purchases. However, I am not sure that KSEX and KMOU are necessarily cost effective. (We can discuss this further.)
- Spend your advertising dollar wisely. I see no direct benefit to the farm stand to advertise at the Roswell Motor Speedway.
- Another method to measure the effectiveness of your various advertising medium is to ask your customers what prompted their visit today. Enclosed is an original sheet of survey slips that you can Xerox and have available at the check out counter for customers to complete. This will not only give you information about the effectiveness of your advertising but also about your product selection. I would be happy to change the copy upon your request.

- The survey slip includes name and address information that could be entered into a database and used for a mailing each year when you re-open. Asking for an email address would even make future customer communication more cost effective and could be done with greater frequency.

## **MARKETING & PROMOTIONS TO SELL PRODUCT**

In-store marketing offers and promotions can increase the average customer sale.

### **Recommendations:**

- Besides the special offers made in your advertising you can also have special offers for the walk-in customers that should be different from your ads. These offers should also tie-into products that are very abundant or based on dollars spent to increase the sale.
- Customer frequency cards insure repeat business and can increase the average sale. I have designed a card based on \$5.00 increments with a bonus given after a \$50.00 total purchase. The cards can *only be* punched at \$5.00 intervals of purchase. We can change the offer based on a different dollar amount you prefer. (A local printer or copy shop could make these up for you on a heavier paper stock.)

## **COMMUNITY DONATIONS**

Giving your distressed product regularly to your local Roswell Community Food Pantry and His House Church is very good service that Graves Farm Stand provides for these organizations.

- Place a couple of signs (see enclosed) around your market about your donations. Take credit for your generous involvement in your community.
- After you have boxed the product to give to your local food pantries remove them from the market. Leaving it on the floor in the back area takes up space and doesn't look attractive.

## **SCHOOL TOURS**

Generate more income for Graves Farm by restructuring a school tour program to make a profit at \$4.00 per child.

### **Recommendations:**

- The program you offered in past years was too labor intense, too long and offered too much free product for the student for you to money.
- The average school tour program lasts from 45 minutes to an hour with additional time allowed for picnicking.
- Provide a \$4.00 per child program that includes the following elements: Wagon ride, short talk about what you grow on the farm and farming techniques and an opportunity for the child to have a hands-on experience of picking product from the field. In your case, the product may vary based on daily and seasonal availability.
- The educational talk should be professional & well organized. I'd recommend hiring a person trained as a teacher and accustomed to talking with children at various ages. You often use props and other visuals to make sure we keep the children's attention.
- The New Mexico Farm Bureau has an Ag in the Classroom program curriculum they supply for teachers that would be a good starting point to develop your tour content. (See resource sheet for contact.)
- Provide some of the Ag in the Classroom literature to give to the teachers so the learning experience can continue in the classroom. A sample is

enclosed of a packet of materials I had developed at our farm for pumpkins.

- Enclosed is a sample brochure that could be mailed or taken to your local schools to announce your tour program. (I am happy to change the copy based on your input.)
- Visit a farm that has a successful school tour program. David told us about Howard McCall of McCall Land and Cattle outside of Albuquerque that hosts up to a 1,000 school children a day. (See the resource sheet.)

### **FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS**

Festivals and special events will attract new customers and build your sales throughout the year. Be the first farm in your area to create events to broaden the appeal of your farm destination and market.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Once you clear the large junk area by the front of your farm entrance you will have plenty of space for parking and activities to host community and farm events.
- Opportunities for community events allow you to charge a booth or space rental. Events such as: old car shows, flea market and craft shows.
- Create your own events: Chile Pepper Festival, Watermelon Stomp. Be creative by hosting activities and themes that tie into your crops. I would be happy to discuss this with your further to develop several themes for next year.
- Develop an event to tie into the Roswell aliens/UFO 4<sup>th</sup> of July event. Take advantage of the crowds already coming to Roswell. The “Aliens Have Landed at Graves Farm.” There are many fun ideas we could brainstorm to make your event a “must see” for out-of-towners. The Roswell Chamber of Commerce or tourism department would appreciate having another attraction to offer during that week.
- While hosting events takes a lot of advance planning and setup, the rewards of big crowds spending money on entertainment, food concessions and farm stand sales more than offset the hard work.

The Halloween season has become BIG business at pumpkin farms. By cleaning out the front of your property you have a large space to build pumpkin displays and offer entertainment for the family.

**Recommendations:**

- Upgrade your fall/pumpkin season by hosting special activities to attract families. You don't necessarily have to grow the pumpkins to get into this business.
- The fall/Halloween season includes: plenty of pumpkins, corn stalks, fall squash, Indian corn, corn stalks and colorful displays.
- Develop special October weekend events that will attract families with children. Families are willing to spend money for this kind of family entertainment.

Festival Activities can include: wagon rides, animal petting with feed for sale, face painting, pony rides, games, music, inflatables, entertainers etc. Food concessions are also an important revenue source.

- Use outside concessionaires to assist you with activities and food until you have the equipment and resources to handle it all yourself.
- Haunted Hayrides offered Friday and Saturday nights in October are also a big draw for pumpkin farms. David suggested that you visit Anna Lyles at the Mesilla Valley Corn Maze in Fairacres this year to see how these are handled. (See resource sheet.) Your sons David and Andrew already seem quite interested in this activity.
- Have your sons go to the Internet to view several other farm Haunted Hayrides. (See resource sheet and enclosures.) In my Internet search there were 6,570 hits for Haunted Hayrides!

**OFF-FARM EVENTS**

Participate in off-farm activities to sell your product and to attract new customers to visit your farm stand.

**Recommendations:**

- Continue to participate in the Roswell Chile & Cheese Festival. Besides selling product hand out your frequency card to encourage returning to the farm for additional purchases.
- Make up coupons or flyer to be distributed at off-farm events that provide a map with directions plus months and hours of operation.

- Select other high profile community events and parades where Graves farm can sell product and/or gain recognition with coupons and flyers.

## Graves Farm Resources

School Tour Curriculum  
New Mexico Farm Bureau  
Jennifer Hopper  
Ag in the Classroom  
Curriculum Coordinator  
Las Cruces, New Mexico  
505-532-4700  
[www.nmfb.org](http://www.nmfb.org)

School Tours & Fall Festival  
Howard McCall  
McCall Land and Cattle Co.  
1524 Eubank NE, Ste. 5  
Albuquerque, NM 87112  
Farm located in Moriarty  
505-379-4333  
[www.mccallcattle.com/pumpkinpatch](http://www.mccallcattle.com/pumpkinpatch)

Corn Maze  
Anna Lyles  
Mesilla Valley Corn Maze  
PO Box 388  
Fairacres, NM 88033  
505-526-1919

Haunted Hayrides sites on the Internet  
[www.fieldofscreams.com](http://www.fieldofscreams.com)  
[www.hobbsgrove.com](http://www.hobbsgrove.com)  
[www.quigs.com](http://www.quigs.com)

Animal Feed/gumball machines  
[www.123vending.com](http://www.123vending.com)  
1-888-525-6115.

The machines start at \$49.95 and pay for themselves and the feeding and upkeep of animals.