

X. Bringing Products To Market: Distribution Challenges

Before the on-premise activities could be implemented it was critical to make certain that product for the study would be available on the shelves for purchase. Each grower in the study faced a different challenge. In the case of the Pennsylvania Simply Sweet Onion™ it was a case of bringing 19 tons of onions 300 miles across the state to a distributor for delivery to the stores. With the Country Time Farm pork hot dogs it was more a challenge of making certain that delivery frequency by the grower was sufficient to keep products in inventory. With the Lancaster Select organic cheeses a change at the processing plant was required in order to deliver products suitable for retail sales.

Comparatively Bell & Evans chicken was the one product in the study that was well established in the distribution channel and did not require any special support.

Facing these distribution challenges was key not only for the success of the study but to the ongoing viability of the products beyond the FSMIP project.

Shipping 19 Tons of Onions – Cross Creek Farms LLC was the first grower of the Pennsylvania Simply Sweet who saw the advantages of expanding the market for the product from its Southwest Pennsylvania home to the Philadelphia market as a way of getting additional attention for Pennsylvania's newest product. In addition a distributor who could supply the onions during the period of the study was needed.

Trucking costs were minimized by focusing on the peak period of onion availability when the freshness attribute would be most pronounced and the harvest would be of sufficient quantity to fill two trailer loads with onions. (Simply Sweets are picked in August when the Vidalia is only available out of Controlled Atmosphere storage and the South American super sweets are not yet in the market.) That strategy also required the commitment on the part of the distributor to receive 15 - 19 tons, with 10 tons earmarked for delivery to Clemens Markets for the purpose of the study. The result was a three to four week period when the onion would be available and could be adequately promoted, assuring that the seasonality of the onion was highlighted and availability assured.

Bringing Nitrate-Free Pork To Market – Country Time Farm has been a source of prime cuts of fresh pork for Philadelphia restaurants for three years. Delivery is handled by the farmer, bringing his product to restaurants in Southeast Pennsylvania weekly. However, the test required a more frequent transportation of frozen hot dogs to satisfy potential demand. A system was devised where inventory levels at Food Source were regularly checked. Store management allowed Pennsylvania Preferred access to the freezer walk-in at the store several times each week so that product availability could be monitored. When inventory ran low the farmer was notified. If the delivery could be completed coincident

with the farmer's next visit to Philadelphia then he would drop the product himself. If not, Pennsylvania Preferred made arrangements to have the product delivered to Food Source to assure continuity of availability.

The Cheese Challenge – For several years Old-Order Amish dairy farmer John Esh produced organic cheeses for sale within his community, to select restaurants through a cooperative and through farmers markets. In order to participate in the study a distribution arrangement was reached with D. L. Mathews who would be responsible for delivering the product to Clemens Family Markets. Through consultations with principals at Mathews it was decided that the packaging of the product would change from 5# loaves and 1# bricks to 4 oz. and 8 oz. packages for the dairy case. In addition nutrition and content labeling was developed for these new packages. Finally, the product was to be “re-branded” as Lancaster Select to better identify the product's Pennsylvania origins.

While Pennsylvania Preferred worked to complete the distribution, packaging and branding plans nature introduced a challenge that could not be overcome in the period of the study. Sustained drought conditions during the summer of 2002 limited the grazing area for Esh's cows. Having to feed his cows on hay resulted in milk that did not produce cheese of the desired flavor and color. As a result the introduction of Lancaster Select was put off until 2003.