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Cause Marketing Opportunities: *GleanNY*, Donating Food from Farms to NY's Hungry

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Cause marketing has gained popularity in recent years in the United States. Cause marketing connects your business with a cause, which is typically linked to a not-for-profit organization. The benefits of employing cause marketing in your business strategy are twofold. One, you are being helpful and working for the common good in your community, and two, your business is benefiting economically. Economic benefits can include exposure to the public and increases in performance and productivity. Cause marketing can even produce benefits to a business' bottom line. In other words, the benefits of cause marketing for a business may include improved customer relations, positive public relations, additional marketing opportunities, and making more money.

But, what is the relevance of cause marketing to New York State farmers? Cause marketing is quite relevant, particularly considering hunger among disadvantaged communities in the state. The United States has long been known as a land of plenty—and paradoxically, a nation where hunger continues to plague the population. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 14.7 percent of the population, or 17.4 million households, were food insecure in 2009 (i.e., households that were, at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all of the household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food). Many New York State residents also experience food insecurity, although at a somewhat lesser rate than the national average. The USDA estimated in 2009 that 12.9 percent of New York State households were food insecure.

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While food insecure individuals are many, large amounts of food are wasted at different segments along the supply chain. The USDA Economic Research Service estimates that nearly a third of the total edible food available for human consumption in the United State is lost each year. Food waste is higher among perishable products, including fresh fruits and vegetables, milk, grain products, and sweeteners, which ironically could contribute to improve the nutritional status of food insecure people.

A small percentage of unharvested crops, representing thousands and sometimes millions of tons of food, may be fit for human consumption but is left in fields due to such issues as the lack of market for the crop, cosmetic blemishes, mechanical harvesting that leaves behind some crop, and other factors. Past USDA's Economic Research Service estimates indicated that each year in the United States about 6 to 7 percent of planted acreage for human consumption is not harvested. The loss of these nutritious products could be eliminated or greatly reduced by incorporating cause marketing, through gleaning, as part of your business' overall marketing strategy.

GleanNY: An opportunity to put cause marketing in practice

Gleaning is an ancient practice, dating from biblical times and conducted beyond through the medieval feudal system, whereby farmers and large landowners were encouraged or required by law to allow the poor to gather crops in the field after the harvest. In contemporary times, gleaning generally refers to collecting food from what is left in the fields after harvest, and donating the goods to food banks or pantries that service the poor and needy. Gleaning in modern times may also refer to farm-food donations out of farmers' packing lines and storage houses. Indeed, according to American Farm Bureau, farmers in New York State donated about 3.6 million pounds to food banks in 2009. New York State leads the nation in farm donations to food banks.

So, if you are a New York farmer, do you occasionally find your farm has edible fruit and vegetables that can't be sold? Have you considered donating your produce to a food bank? *GleanNY* is a new collaborative effort to increase donated food from farms to needy and hungry people across the state. *GleanNY* is a partnership of New York farmers and organizations working to increase the amount of food donated directly from farms to those in need. The partnership encourages the donation of produce that wouldn't otherwise be harvested or sold – food that would be culled due to cosmetic blemishes, irregular size, lack of market or other reasons. The only requirement to participate is that the donated produce must be food-safe and unspoiled. Produce does not have to be washed, graded, or packaged as for retail distribution.

How does it work? Food banks are on the road every day, picking up donations from stores, food processors, warehouses and other institutions. Their trucks can stop by your farm to pick up product. In fact a food bank truck may already be driving by your farm! In some cases, food banks can supply field crates. Otherwise, field crates can be returned to your farm once product is delivered to the food bank. If you have produce to donate, you can call your closest food bank to make arrangements. Like farmers, food banks want to move produce quickly and pickup can often be arranged for the same day. When a donation is too small, food banks work with local pantries to coordinate the pickup or delivery of food.

And what are the incentives for farmers to participate in *GleanNY*? In addition to contributing to a good cause, the benefits of cause marketing from gleaning are evident from a business perspective. Food banks sometimes have funds available to reimburse the farmers for

the cost of gleaning activities. In addition, food banks generally provide receipts and donations may be tax deductible. Therefore, if you are a farmer, check with your accountant to find out if the donation meets the conditions for a tax deduction! And do not forget to inquire about funding when you contact the food bank. Get started this season!

For information about donating, call the Food Bank Association of New York State at (518) 433-4505.

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