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Finding Market Information for Agriculture Products – Where Can You Go?

by

Kristen Park, Extension Support Specialist
Food Industry Management Program, Cornell University

I recently worked on a project investigating the market potential of an item that, frankly, had such low consumption, no one bothers to report on it. I tried to be as creative as I could and investigated some very interesting chat rooms and blogs as well as a lot of black holes. So I can sympathize with all of you trying to investigate the market for a new crop or enterprise.

I thought I would share some of the more accessible websites which cater to producers and other entrepreneurs interested in value-added agriculture. I urge everyone who is interested in developing, expanding, or investigating a new business “opportunity” to either (1) own a computer which is linked to the internet, or (2) be prepared to go to your local library—a lot. (You could also consider hiring a poor college student to do the web research for you).

Below is a bibliography of some of the websites that I have bookmarked in my browser. Even though some are much better than others, there is something about every one of them that I appreciate, although not every one will be of use to you.

Bibliography of Websites Devoted to Value-Added Markets

Internet Resources

Agriculture Market Resource Center—AgMRC

<http://www.agmrc.org/homepage.html>

If there is one national information resource for value-added agriculture, this is probably it. Top notch resource. Sometimes contains too much information without a filtering mechanism. The website flow is good, however. Once you find some good sources, follow the links. These also lead to great information. The following categories contain articles, references, and research bulletins useful in obtaining information on agricultural businesses:

- Investigate Value-Added Products (Commodities & Products)
- Explore Market and Industry Trends (Explore Market & Industry Trends)
- Create and Operate a Business (Create & Operate a Business)
- Locate Consultants and Businesses (Locate Consultants & Businesses)

Agriculture Utilization Research Council—State of Minnesota

<http://www.auri.org/research/research.htm>

AURI was created and is supported by the Minnesota state legislature, and its purpose is to help develop new uses and new markets for the state's agricultural products.

Contains reports and studies of alternative agriculture, energy sources, and more. Do some digging around on this site. It is not as logically laid out as AgMRC's (above), but there is a lot of very interesting information hidden in the newsletters and research reports. A lot of their grant projects offer confidentiality; however, they do offer a lot of useful information about what, how, and where on many agricultural projects. Some initiatives include:

- AURI Fuels
- Biodiesel
- Community Manure Food Waste Digestion System
- Growing Hybrid Poplar Trees as a Crop
- Manure Digester
- Meat Goat Initiative
- Meat Goat Enterprise Budget
- Meat Industry Impact Study
- Multi Species Report
- Oilseed Executive Summary

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA)

<http://www.attra.org>

This is a super resource about sustainable agriculture which I almost left off the list until prompted by a user. The publications are excellent, and they provide additional information about grants, breaking news, ask the expert, a “question of the week” and highlights of local, regional, USDA and other federal sustainable ag activities.

Center for Profitable Agriculture—State of Tennessee

<http://cpa.utk.edu/level2/educmaterials/default.htm>

This partnership between Tennessee Farm Bureau and The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture provides assistance for producer projects by Extension specialists. This site lists all the projects undertaken with a useful 2-3 paragraph description of each project. In addition, the site hosts some nice Extension-type educational materials. Pages of interest on this site include:

- Value-Added Projects
- Educational Materials
 - Extension Publications
 - Information Sheets
 - Presentations and Slide Shows
 - Other

Illinois Value-Added Rural Development Center (IVARDC)

<http://www.value-added.org/>

The website provides some online handbooks, research reports, presentations of value-added projects, primarily of commodities and projects targeted to Midwest agriculture. If you are a cooperative or are interested in forming a coop, you might want to review some of the research case studies provided. Does have 2 pre-feasibility evaluators for biodiesel and ethanol. Otherwise not much “how-to” information provided on the site.

Keystone Agricultural Innovation Center—Penn State University

<http://kaic.psu.edu/resources.htm>

This site hosts a new look. The focus is to serve Pennsylvania businesses, but contains information useful especially to those in the Northeast. Hosts a page devoted to mail

order/internet marketing accessed via <Business Management/Marketing Options>. You might also want to click on through the <Related Links> to the Farm Management site at Penn State:

<http://farmmanagement.aers.psu.edu/Default.asp>

Michigan State University Product Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources

<http://www.aec.msu.edu/product/strategic.htm>

This is a link to **The Strategic Marketing Institute** at Michigan State University, which has a number of opportunity assessment papers and white papers pertaining to market development for agricultural, food and natural resource industries. The papers are excellent information resources.

New Ventures for Food and Agriculture in Indiana—Purdue University

<http://www.agecon.purdue.edu/newventures/>

A focused website listing practical resources for those looking to add or develop a new business venture.

- Purdue Value-Added Resources
- Value-Added Business Basics
- Value-Added Processing/Products
- New Ventures Team
- Upcoming Programs

Ag Innovation & Commercialization Center—Purdue University

http://www.agecon.purdue.edu/aicc/Educational_Materials.asp

This page is also from Purdue and can be accessed from the New Ventures website. This site contains a web-based business plan workbook. All you need to do is register (for free) and you can run through the tutorial and workbook planner. This does require sitting in front of the computer, so if you want something that you can pick up and put down on a moments notice, you might want to use a workbook on hard copy (you can find an excellent pre-planning guide at:

http://www.nyfarmviability.org/aic/pre-planning_guide.htm)

Government Sites

Economic Research Service

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/>

Truly a wealth of information provided on their website. It provides more technical data about consumption and markets than the websites above, but is the best place to go for historical databases. You might want to go directly to their Food Sector page at:

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Browse/FoodSector/> for more information directly applicable to the ag sector. Don't ignore, however, their Food and Nutrition Assistance and Diet, Health, and Safety sites if you have a business proposition which would involve these issues.

National Agricultural Statistics Service

<http://www.nass.usda.gov>

Again a wealth of databases at your finger tips. NASS provides production-level, or farmgate, information.

New York Ag Statistics Service

<http://www.nass.usda.gov/ny/>

This site is the NY NASS and therefore provides farm-gate, production-level information for New York State.

Other web sites to visit if you have the time and need the statistics:

Government	Government
Fedstats: One Stop Shopping for Federal Statistics	http://www.fedstats.gov/
STAT-USA/Internet Home Page	http://www.stat-usa.gov/
USDA	
U.S. Department of Agriculture Homepage	http://www.usda.gov/
USDA Economic Research Service	http://www.ers.usda.gov/
ERS/USDA Outlook and Yearbook Reports	http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/OutlookReports.htm

Government	Government
Food Markets Briefing Room, USDA/ERS	http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/
ERS/USDA Data - Organic Production	http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/organic/
Food and Nutrition Surveys—Food & Nutrition Information Center-USDA	http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000056.html
Foreign Agricultural Service Home Page	http://www.fas.usda.gov/
Direct Marketing Home Page	http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/
Bureau of Labor Statistics	
Bureau of Labor Statistics Home Page	http://www.bls.gov
Consumer Expenditure Survey Home Page	http://www.bls.gov/cex/
Census Bureau	
U.S. Census Bureau Home Page	http://www.census.gov/
Statistical Abstract of the United States	http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/statab.html

"Smart Marketing" is a monthly marketing newsletter for extension publication in local newsletters and for placement in local media. It reviews the elements critical to successful marketing in the food and agricultural industry. Articles are written by faculty members in the Department of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University.

"Share the gift of communication." Please cite or acknowledge when using this material.