**Writing a Marketing Strategy for your farm**

**Product:** What will you sell on your farm?

For example:

**BroadFork Farm - Products:**

Vegetables, Herbs, and Seedlings retailed through the Farmers markets

* Primary enterprise for 2011.
* 30+ types of crops; standard market vegetables except sweet corn and potatoes
* Year-round selling through storage crops and winter-harvested greens
* Edible flowers and culinary herbs

**Firmly Rooted Farm - Product Description:**

* Vegetables, herbs and flowers will be the primary enterprises for the 2013 season.
* We will market standard vegetable crops except sweet corn, potatoes, cauliflower and broccoli. We will also market standard crops “with a twist”: shallots as well as onions, specialty salad mixes along with lettuce, and broccolini instead of broccoli.
* In 2013 the main market season will be 24 weeks, with some minor sales of storage crops and hardy greens later in the season. In 2014 or 2015 we will secure year round sales through CSA customers, word of mouth, restaurants, or by branching out to the Stratford farmers market which operates year round.

**Opportunity:** Why have you chosen your product(s)? What puts you in a good position to offer it? What are the unique features that make your product stand out from the rest? Why would customers choose your product(s) over your competitors?

For example:

**BroadFork Farm:**

*Our Strengths and Advantages:*

* knowledge of food preparation
* knowledge of nutrition
* human powered
* marketing advantage: attention to detail; beauty of food – aesthetically pleasing production knowledge (including year-round and storage requirements)

*The Opportunity:*

People have never been so interested in high-quality, local food and how it is produced, in freshness and in traceability. Customers are seeking out specialist producers and some have a desire to reduce food miles.

**Firmly Rooted Farm - Opportunity:**

We are in the age of the foodie. Canning is hip, juicing is cool, living tiny is big, and 2012 was dubbed the year of kale. Food focused documentaries abound, and books on homesteading and self reliance are common on book store (and home) shelves everywhere. Customers are starting to turn to food for health and are realizing that “food is also about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity” (Pollan, 8). Food is necessity and indulgence all in one. Both Restaurant Central (Canada) and the Canadian Grocer have published studies regarding food trends to watch for in 2013. Based on their findings (summarized below), the market opportunity for vegetable growers is huge.

**Market Research Summary:** If any was conducted you can summarize it here. How do you know people will buy your product?

For example:

**BroadFork Farm - Market Research Summary**

In talking with organic producers in the area, and attending one of the markets that we plan on attending, we found that it is possible for a small scale grower to make $1500+ per week at the Lunenburg market. The potential of the Bridgewater Market and the on-farm sales are still unknown. By having a diversity of outlets we hope to mitigate any shortfalls that any particular one may have.

On both Farmers' Market websites, we have looked at pictures of other vendor's stalls and have a sense of what is currently being offered. We feel our experience and aptitude for marketing vegetables will allow us to be competitive and attractive in those settings.

Here are 2 examples of the differential strengths (s) and weaknesses (w) of 2 competitors we saw at the Lunenburg Farmers' Market and their product/offering:

* Competitor #1 (name not shown)
	+ conventional (w)
	+ wide variety (s)
	+ market stand looks (w)
	+ grower not always at stand (w)
	+ longevity/reputation (s)
* Competitor #2 (name not shown)
	+ certified organic (s)
	+ availability of product (s)
	+ presentation and signage (w)

**Firmly Rooted Farm - Market Research**

The food culture in Huron County is growing but is still in its early stages. There are few well established organic farms to compete with. Our main sales outlets will be farmers’ markets. The map below shows our relative location to various markets and chart below summarizes the markets available in our region within a one hour drive.



The markets we’ve selected were chosen for the following reasons:

* We are only willing to attend two markets as market attendance requires significant time away from the farm and degrades left over produce.
* We needed to select farmers’ markets that run on separate days as we only have one vehicle suitable for transport and hope to attend together.
* We wanted markets that are located in what are considered larger centres in the rural area, but not major cities where it would be difficult to differentiate ourselves as producers.

Our selected markets have drawbacks that may need to be addressed in the future:

* It is possible that we may not be able to reach high enough levels of sales to meet our targets in these markets.
* When we move towards year round production and a higher level of winter storage we will want a winter sales outlet and may need to consider attending the Stratford market.

Our research regarding our selected markets is included below:

*Goderich Farmers Market:*

The Goderich Farmers market is a well established outdoor market with strong attendance. An organic farm from the area shared their sales records with us for the 2010 season, noting that with good representation they were able to match sales levels of the Stratford market which they also attended in 2010. At the time this farm was the only certified organic producer selling in Goderich; they no longer attend markets. The records they shared show maximum sales of approximately $800.00 per market day and average sales of $460.00. It is worth noting that the farmers’ market was a secondary sales outlet for the farm with their primary focus being CSA.

Though there are 41 vendors at the market this includes relatively few vegetable producers; there are many bakers and craftspersons. There is one well established vegetable producer using organic methods; this producer offers very few greens and tends to grow very standard vegetable varieties. Our focus on greens, and standard vegetables “with a twist”, such as rainbow beets and carrots, patty pan squash, shallots, herbs, etc., will act to set us apart and attract those that seek new, interesting foods.

*Exeter Farmers Market:*

The Exeter market is a newer smaller market that we are less familiar with. We’ve selected it because it runs Thursday afternoon to evening, giving people an opportunity to shop on the way home from work. The market is also extremely discriminating in selecting vendors. They operate on the rule that a maximum of three vendors may offer the same products. Venders also can only sell what they personally produce; exceptions can be granted for items that are not currently at market but that are produced locally.

We’ve been in contact with the market manager and will receive an application package in late February.

**Description of Customers/Markets:** How do you plan to get your product to market? Will you sell via farmers markets, online, to restaurants, etc? For each of your target markets/customers, it’s a good idea to include any details you can, for example: who they are, their specific needs or demands, how you will get your product to them (distribution), any potential challenges or potential for future growth, what percentage of your products will go to each, etc.

For example:

**BroadFork Farm**

Market Segments/Niches/Target Market:

* Young families, moms
* People interested in health: Raw foodists/Vegetarian/Vegan, Slow Food, Holistic

nutritionists, naturopathic doctors (and their clients)

* Shambhala Buddhist Community (fairly extensive in Nova Scotia and connected

with Windhorse Farm)

* Health conscious foodies, Scuppies (socially conscious yuppies)
* Restaurants/caterers (already connected with Conscious Caterers, caterers for Windhorse Farms events/workshops)
* Vacationers wanting convenient, local food option

Industry trends:

* Farmers' Market and organics are popular
* awareness of environmental problems – climate change, fossil fuels
* nutrition, healthy living
* supporting local farmers (especially new and young!)
* slow food / know your food movement
* 2011 “Hot trends” List from the National Restaurant Association listed Locally grown produce as #2, Sustainability as #3, Simplicity/back to basics as #9, Farm branded ingredients as #10, Organic produce as #14, Nutrition/health as #15.

Description of Markets:

Farmer's Markets

1. Our Thursday market (Lunenburg) is well established year-round market. We intend to be year-round vendors there for the long-term. We will attend as long as possible into the winter of 2011-12, but are unsure at this point whether we will extend our lease another year at Windhorse Farm (affecting our storage and growing capabilities).
2. Our Saturday market (Bridgewater) is a newer market. We are unsure of how much traffic and sales to expect but see great potential for that market and hope to help build up its success.

On-farm

1. Participants coming to farm for events, workshops, retreats (we would like to have a broad offering from the farm store so retreatants have all their needs met)
2. Caterers providing meals on-site to workshop participants

Risks of Markets

1. Farmers' Markets:
	* low attendance = low sales
	* need more produce than we can sell in a day to maintain look of abundance
	* increased labour cost to harvest additional produce

Every week, we'll be harvesting crops in anticipation of a high-volume sales day but there will always be the risk that the market's attendance on a given day will be low (=low sales) due to outside factors such as weather. Some studies have shown these losses to be as much as 20% or more of the produce brought to market. We will also want to keep our table stocked well, giving the impression of abundance so we will be inclined to bring more than we expect to sell. This increases our labour costs for the additional production, harvest, and preparation for market. However, because we are attending 2 farmer's markets (that are only 2 days apart) and are selling on-farm as well, we are hoping this will reduce the amount of unsold harvested produce. We have also found a food bank in the community that we are hoping to donate excess throughout the year.

1. Farm Store
	* need regularity in hours and product availability for repeat/steady customers
	* unestablished market for the area
	* either need to staff store or work by honour system
	* sales may not justify time taken to staff store
	* possibility of theft if not staffed
	* not enough produce or time to have store stocked every day

**Firmly Rooted Farm:**

Farmers Market - 60% of total income:

Who:

* Upper middle class individuals with post secondary education
* Pregnant woman or mothers with young children
* Health minded individuals; vegetarians, vegans, those interested in the slow food movement
* Tourists and vacationers “stocking up” for their stay in Ontario’s West Coast
* Those with major health concerns; Huron has one of the highest levels of heart disease, diabetes and obesity in Ontario. These individuals are being encouraged by physicians and family members to improve eating habits

What:

The majority of crops are being produced for market sales. Essentially a portion of all types of food produced will be brought to market. How: Brian and I will bring produce to each market using his Toyota Tacoma truck and 8 x 10’ trailer. The trailer is an open design so we will cover the produce with wet sheets and tarps for transit.

Connecting:

Farmers market sales are direct to consumer so word of mouth will have a strong impact on increasing our sales. We will also use social media to build interest in local community members (eg. ‘tweet’: check out our spicy salad mix on Sat. at the Goderich market! Green, purple, yellow... snap beans are ready this Sat!).

Challenges:

1. It will take time to develop a loyal customer base at the farmers market.
2. Poor weather will lead to poor sales at market.
3. Some of the vegetables we’ve chosen to market are somewhat unfamiliar (eg. collards, Jerusalem artichokes) and will require client education to promote sales.

Growth:

As a new vendor sales will increase over time as we develop repeat clients and a positive reputation, once sales peak the potential for growth will likely be limited. The Exeter market is relatively new (4 years in operation) and so is still gaining in popularity. Over time market attendance should increase which will correlate to improved sales potential. The Goderich market is well established and will remain more consistent in attendance.

**Smallholdings Farm**

Market: Restaurants - About 40% of projected income

*Who:* Chefs in Toronto and other local, culinary centres like Stratford.

*What:* In speaking with chefs in Toronto and the folks at 100km Foods , it is clear that there is a demand for a consistent supply of high-quality baby-sized vegetables. Some of the main crops targeted at chefs this year include, but are not limited to baby-sized fennel, carrots, beets, heads of lettuce, radishes, turnips, chicories, tomatoes, cucumbers, green onions, and broccoli. I am also interested having an ongoing conversation with chefs and growing vegetables that they would like to try.

*How:* I will be distributing to Toronto chefs through 100km Foods, Inc. This company picks up at farms two days each week and delivers in Toronto two days each week. They do not currently pick-up at farms in my area, so I will be driving to meet them somewhere around Orangeville a couple of times per week.

I have not yet determined how I will deliver vegetables to local chefs/restaurants. I am hoping that this will not involve my personal delivery to each restaurant, but that there is a distributor who can make deliveries. I need to do more research into this. One exception is that the Ancaster Mill and associated restaurants pick-up at Mapletons, so I can hopefully sell some vegetables and have them delivered with their ice cream.

*Connecting:* Making and maintaining connections with these customers will involve a lot of networking and word of mouth. I will attend chef-farmer events whenever possible and not be shy about approaching chefs to discuss Smallholdings. I am hoping to have some chefs come out to visit/tour Smallholdings in order to be completely transparent in my practices and, hopefully, create a relationship of understanding. I am also creating a presence on social media like Facebook and Twitter so that customers who are not in my immediate area can stay involved and up-to-date in my day-to-day goings-on. Furthermore, I hope to be involved with the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, Slow Food Toronto, and other organizations that aim to bring people involved in food together.

*Challenges:*

1. Chefs can be somewhat unreliable in their follow-through. My vegetables will not be cheap and restaurant budgets are limited. However, I think that I will be able to work around this by ensuring my product is good value (great quality for the price) and establishing lasting relationships with chefs that will buy my product. I have already started to develop these kinds of relationships and have chefs that know chefs who know chefs who are all excited about my product.
2. Distributing to local restaurants is a potential challenge. I do not want to spend all of my time delivering to restaurants, so I need to either find a local distributor, or be very careful/distance-conscious about the restaurants I supply.
3. Succession planting for a consistent supply is key for this market – chefs put vegetables on their menu and expect to be able to access them. This will involve some trial and error at first while I establish the rhythms for these vegetables. However, after a season or two (and with my experience doing succession planting at the New Farm) I should be able to overcome this.
4. I need to be conscious of the potentially scarring results of a crop that is not sellable because of quality due to factors like early frost, poor weather, or disease. Unfortunately, this is not always avoidable or preventable, but I will do everything that I can to ensure this does not happen by using tools like row cover and irrigation. Also, proper communication with chefs and distributor during a crop failure is critical – ensuring that everyone understands the, at times unpredictable, nature of growing food.

*Growth potential:* There is a lot of potential in this market for growth. I would like to become the number one producer of tiny vegetables for restaurants in Toronto and other culinary centres in the region. If I specialize correctly and produce a consistent supply of high-quality vegetables, I will do this.

**Price:** What is your pricing strategy? How have you determined what price you’ll be charging for your product/service? How does your pricing compare to that of your “competitors”? Will you have one price for each product, or will you offer discounts based on volume, farm pick-up, etc?

For example:

**BroadFork Farm - Pricing Strategy**

We have already set our intended prices and unit sizes for each crop we are growing based

on our current knowledge from having worked at many different farmer's markets throughout the years.

However, these prices and sizes will likely change as we become more familiar with our

markets, customer base and cost of production.

These are the various factors we have kept in mind and will continue to think about as we

fine-tune our prices.

* above average cost but not too high – highest price at market for similar produce, (we don't want to have the lowest prices at market, we want our prices to be on the high end to give the customer the perception of quality and reflect true value)
* check out other farmer's pricing (need to know what the range of prices is at both markets we're attending to see what people are used to)
* check out other outlet pricing – grocery stores, co-op....(see what the perceived value for vegetables is in the marketplace/community)
* what would we pay for this item? (based on our perceptions from working/living in various communities and selling/buying produce)
* what do we want to make? what should the farm be making? (take into account our target sales per week to be on target + how much we have to bring to market)
* was the crop grown in a tunnel or out in the field? tunnel crops should get a higher price, higher cost of “rent” in the tunnel and customers are likely getting product earlier or later in the growing season (customers will often pay more for a product that no one else is offering).
* traditional pricing strategy – factor in cost of production + farm profit (will figure out cost of production during this season and adjust prices/size per unit accordingly)

**Firmly Rooted Farm - Pricing Strategy**

To start we will be using a similar pricing strategy to that used at Everdale. We will also employ multi‐unit mix and match pricing ($3.00 each or 2 for $5.00). This strategy is very effective on us as consumers and we believe it will increase our total sales. We will adjust our pricing based on feedback, sales, other local producers and grocery store prices, and cost of production calculations. We will negotiate prices with restaurants and caterers but are only willing to offer a maximum discount of 20%.

**Smallholdings Farm - Pricing Strategy**

This is an area that is unsure for me right now. I have set an idea of what my prices will look like (see appendix A) but this is an area that requires more market research and feedback. Some factors that I am considering right now include:

* *Market value:* What is the perceived value for this crop in the market? Because there is not a lot to compare my vegetables to in the market right now, it’s hard to know what people will pay. I am going based on instinct and experience.
* *Consistency:* I do not want my prices to change drastically between markets – for example, the price sold wholesale to chefs should not be that different from the price of the same items at the Mapleton’s store. While I will account for differences in how vegetables are packaged (wholesale versus others) I want the price to reflect the true cost of food to all markets.
* *Cost of production:* This is not obvious to me at this point. I think the cost of production will become clear as I go through this season. I will value my labour more as I get started – it seems easier right now to under price my vegetables, because I have not gone through the whole process.

**Promotional Strategy:** How are people going to find out about you and your business? Include as many details as you can.

For example:

**BroadFork Farm - Promotion Strategy:**

1. Web-based Advertising and Communication
	* develop website, facebook page, and twitter account. Operational by March 2011.
	* work on regularly updating, posting photos, info and recipes
	* press releases: to newspapers, radio, web blogs for events at farm or farmers market. We have found a few contacts through online social media and will continue to build media contacts in the future.
	* develop customer database: offer incentives (like free gift card emailed) to customers who give us their email address or mailing address
2. Farmers Markets/Word of Mouth
	* be reliable (always show up at market)
	* provide a good selection each week
	* offer unbeatable quality, stand behind quality
	* develop loyal customers
	* recipe cards handed out each week
	* aesthetically pleasing and abundant market stand set up
3. Packaging
	* clean, neat and abundant
	* greens in plastic bags or bag your own
	* roots in bunches first, then in quarts later on in the season
	* consistent labeling - on bags: logo and website
	* paper bags (large grocery)– stamp with logo and website
	* convenience packages: ex. stir fry bag, salad bag, soup bag (all ingredients and a recipe)
4. Special incentives
	* farmers market CSA/ gift certificate:10% discount for supporting us at beginning of season (beginning fall 2011)
5. Community Reputation Building
	* support local causes: food bank and community events
	* Customer satisfaction guarantee: money back or product to replace
6. Other
	* Connect newcomers to the community with the farm and farmer's markets: they want to feel connected
	* On-farm or at the market: promote special events
	* Recognition with chefs/restaurants in the area
7. Branding
	* brand name, logo, tagline, typography, colours, attitude/voice
	* branding rules: be unique, think long-term, be consistent

**Firmly Rooted Farm - Promotion Strategy**

1. Branding:
	* Develop a recognizable, unique, creative logo with associated colors and typology.
	* Create a voice: fun, excited, educated, and passionate.
	* Be consistent.
	* Market us, tell our story: two people, two cats and big dreams in two hundred square feet. Our tiny house parked on our tiny farm growing amazing food to feed our local community.
	* Focus on the message of food as medicine, food as culture, food as a connection to earth, family and community.
2. Web/ Print:
	* Develop a website, facebook page and twitter account. These should be operational by March‐April of 2013.
	* Ensure that these are consistently updated, a minimum of once per week. We will use Brian’s iphone to make regular in field updates. These can be extremely simple but should be part of our marketing strategy as they can be very effective in making our customers and friends feel like they are part of the farm.
	* Issue press releases to the local newspapers including the Clinton News Record, the Goderich Signal Star and the Seaforth Expositor.
	* Use contacts at the local radio stations to arrange for on‐air interviews.
3. Word of Mouth:
	* Friends, family and farmers’ market clients will be our primary means of word of mouth promotion.
	* We will ensure that our stall is attractive, recognizable, well signed, with a high quality selection of produce. The stall will be branded with our colors and type.
	* We will offer samples.
	* The stall will always have flowers to draw people in.
	* We’ll have recipe cards and good conversation at our stall.
	* We will research our products and make sure we are well versed in methods of preparation and nutritional information.
	* We will strive to answer questions thoroughly so that our customers develop a sense that we are knowledgeable, educated, and that they can depend on us.
	* We’ll come to the market with a ‘farmer sheik’ look: straw hats, cute plaid and big smiles
4. Packaging:
	* Clean, neat, pre packaged/ pre bunched produce
	* We’ll offer convenience kits: stir fry’s, salads, salsa, chicken soup without the chicken, etc.
	* We will print labels at home with our logo, farm name and website and secure them to various bags at market
5. Incentives:
	* We will offer gift certificates.
	* We will also develop some sort of a “coffee card”, a card that can be stamped every time a customer purchases a specific item (e.g. salad greens) or a specific dollar amount ($20.00), they receive a stamp on the card. Once full they get a bonus like one free bunch, or a small denomination gift card. Community Engagement: We will take part in community events such as Taste of Huron.
	* We will offer to take part in food related educational events in the County

**Smallholdings Farm - Promotion Strategy**

I covered some of my promotion strategy in the previous section. Briefly, below are some of the strategies I am currently exploring. All of these strategies focus on building relationships, which is especially important in creating customer loyalty and buzz about what I am doing. I have a unique point of view that I think people will be really interested in; it is just a matter of telling them about it.

1. Networking/Word-of-mouth: This is the most important promotion strategy for the kind of business I am getting into. I need to continue to improve my ability to talk about my farm, what I do, and what makes me special. I will be attending events (both those specifically targeted at networking and others) and finding any reason to see my customers, meet potential customers and exchange information with them.
2. Website/Social Media: I have launched my website already and I am establishing a presence on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and am considering starting a blog. Because my customers are not all within a few minutes from my farm, it is critical that I find ways to stay connected and make them feel involved in the day-to-day activities at Smallholdings.
3. Newspaper/other local media: I am considering put a couple of ads in the local newspaper (The Wellington Advertiser, for example) announcing the availability of my vegetables at Mapleton’s. I hope to collaborate with them on these marketing initiatives.
4. Farmers market: As I have mentioned, I do not view the farmers market as a way to move huge amounts of vegetables. While I do intend to sell vegetables, and hopefully a significant number of them, it is more about being a part of the community, meeting people, and promoting my farm to the local community.
5. Organization/conference participation: Staying involved in food and farming groups and organizations will keep me abreast of news in the industry, help me to connect with likeminded people, and could even help me to promote my own farm. For example, I intend to join Slow Food Toronto, the Canada Organic Growers, and become involved with the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance. Attending events put on by these groups is important to ensuring Smallholdings is a part of this community.
6. Farm visits: I will be inviting customers (focusing this and next year on chefs) to the farm to see how I grow my vegetables. I learned at the New Farm that inviting people out to “work” for a day on the farm really helps them to understand the cost of food, creates lasting friendships and bonds, and puts your farm into the spotlight.