

# On-Line Marketing Campaign Produces For Food Companies

Megan Hart, The Topeka Capital-Journal

(AP) — Topeka farmers and food processors are giving a state agricultural marketing program positive reviews one year after it was revamped to reach more people online. Lenny Meier, who sells a mix of produce from his own farm and out-of-state vegetables at Meier's Market, said he has seen new customers who found the store through the Land of Kansas site. "Obviously if that happens, it's working," he said. "We get a lot of people from out of town and we get a lot of locals too."

Meier said he has participated in From the Land of Kansas since it launched in 1988. At that time, it mostly involved word-of-mouth marketing, ads in print publications and signage for participating businesses. Now, it focuses more on online marketing, which is helpful in reaching new customers, he said. "Your older customers are established. They're going to come," he said. "The people that you're trying to attract are your younger customers." The website launched in August and now lists all member companies, said Stacy Mayo, director of From the Land of Kansas.

Staff are now working on launching an online store where people who live farther away can order Kansas products, she said. "It's a great opportunity for those smaller companies that may not have a URL," she said.

From the Land of Kansas debuted under the Kansas Department of Agriculture, but moved to the Department of Commerce in 2005, where it was rebranded as Simply Kansas. It returned to KDA in 2011. A team reviewed and redeveloped Simply Kansas for almost two years, relaunching under its original name in April 2013. The program offers marketing and business development help to Kansas businesses with ties to food and agriculture.

Some people still are confused about what From the Land of Kansas means, Mayo said, but the Department of Agriculture is working on outreach to build awareness. Hopefully, the logo featuring an image of wheat (and a modified logo for gluten-free products) will be a signal for people interested in local foods, she said. People are getting more conscious about how healthy the foods they eat are and want to know where their vegetables come from, so even chain grocery stores are promoting their local offerings, Meier said. From the Land of Kansas gives small farmers and food sellers a chance to reach people who want to know more about their food, he said.

"They want to know where it comes from and what's been sprayed on it," he said.

To be eligible, farmers and ranchers must grow or produce 100 percent of their product in Kansas, and "value-added agriculture" has to buy all of its raw material from Kansas and do all processing here. That could include crafts like carving with Kansas wood or candles made from Kansas soybeans, Mayo said. Manufacturers,

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which can include agriculture-related products ranging from snacks to farm equipment, have to do all of their processing in Kansas, but don't have to buy all of their materials here. Restaurants that are based in Kansas or serve one or more foods primarily from Kansas also can join, as can agritourism operations.

"We wanted to make sure everything was agriculture-based," Mayo said.

The program has five levels of service. Level 1 is free, and gives the member the right to list contact information, to be featured in one product category on the website, to receive the members-only newsletter and to sell items on the website. The highest level, Level 5, costs \$2,000, and includes other benefits, such as the right to participate in the Kansas pavilion in international food shows, to be featured in photos and videos on the website, and to get an annual product labeling and shelf life test from Kansas State University. The program uses \$100,000 from the state's Market Development Fund for now, Mayo said, but it was designed to become self-sustaining from memberships, sponsorships and other sales.

Changes to the program included reviving the From the Land of Kansas trade show, but with a new emphasis on selling to stores or buyers who then resell it, Mayo said. The program also offers help to new business owners. Williams said they are participating in the top level of the program, and she was involved with the process to redo the marketing program last year. She said she thought the program was better for focusing on agricultural products from Kansas, instead of the broader Simply Kansas program.

"It goes back more to the roots of Kansas products," she said.

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