

Abstract:

New Jersey is the most densely populated state with 8.9 million people living in an area of 7,354 square miles. In the northeast region, on-farm direct marketing has evolved to be the main marketing strategy for small to medium farms and often includes activities, festivals and other high visitor volume events. Educational assistance on topics related to risk management, food safety, financial planning, hospitality training, liability strategies and regulatory compliance are requested from agricultural service providers. A Rutgers University team of 3 agricultural agents and 1 extension specialist trained extension personnel and other agricultural service providers to assist farmers with strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis. This was done through a series of 11 farm visits throughout New Jersey. Prior to the farm visits, farmers with direct marketing operations were mailed educational materials and a list of questions. At each visit the leadership team conducted on-site SWOT analysis with agricultural service providers and the farm manager and followed up with a recommendations report. A bulletin, "SWOT Analysis for On-Farm Direct Operations" was developed for agricultural service providers and farmers as an assessment tool for managing risk and liability issues for direct marketing farms. A classroom training was conducted on May 11, 2017 with 38 agricultural service providers in attendance to complete the training program. Eleven agricultural service providers committed to using the knowledge gained from on-farm trainings and the classroom. Three trainees have held trainings and distributed the SWOT bulletin to 85 farmers. The bulletin is available for everyone at http://sare.rutgers.edu/pdfs/SWOT_Toolkit.pdf.



SWOT analysis is a tool that helps you evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) involved in any business enterprise — including farms and ranches.

SWOT analysis can help you gain insights into the past and think of possible solutions to existing or potential problems — either for an existing business or new venture.

Key areas in which the service providers reported a change in knowledge, attitudes, skills and/or awareness:

Year 1:

17 ag service providers participated in on-farm trainings for SWOT analysis in 2015. All participants indicated they gained knowledge about SWOT analysis for risk management for on-farm direct marketing operations and felt the training was a valuable experience for those working in this area.

Year 2:

During the fall 2016 training pre and post surveys of 28 agricultural service providers indicated results showing 5 participants felt SWOT analysis for on-farm direct marketing would be related to their major programming responsibilities. Of those 5, 4 had previously attended at least one of the on-farm trainings provided in 2015 and 2016. Twenty-one out of 28 participants replied they improved learning about assessment for risk management and farm safety for on-farm direct marketing operations.

Year 3:

In May 2017, a classroom training with 36 agricultural service providers (this also included providers who had previously attended on-farm training events) was conducted to teach SWOT analysis as related to on-farm direct marketing. Participants were surveyed on their gains in knowledge and their willingness to utilize the information provided with their farmer clientele. Survey results showed 83% of the participants indicated their knowledge of assessing on-farm direct marketing operations improved, but only 28% said they would utilize the information in the future with their farmer clientele. Low numbers of participants who would continue using SWOT analysis with on-farm direct marketing operations, was somewhat expected since working with farmer clientele with on-farm direct marketing, was not a major responsibility of most of the participants. As is the norm for most agricultural service providers, they specialize in different program areas and thus, some educators, agency or non-profit personnel are not responsible for working with on-farm direct marketing operations. Agricultural service providers who attended the classroom training were interested in the topic, but responded that they now knew who to send clientele to for more information about on-farm direct marketing needs rather than answering inquiries on this subject themselves.

Conclusion:

Using tools like SWOT analysis to evaluate current business management of an existing operation or planning for a new business can be a valuable strategy for on-farm direct marketing operations. With 28% of agricultural service providers indicating they would utilize the training they received to work with farmers they serve, the outcome is a success in terms of the farmer audience that will be reached. In addition, resources from this program are available to areas outside of New Jersey via a website where the leadership team is tracking downloads. In one-year's time, this website has had 1,344 page views and 1,178 page users, with 112 downloads of the bulletin "SWOT Analysis for On-Farm Direct Operations".