

# Role of cooperative extension in sustainable agricultural marketing in New York: from farm to table

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**Abstract:** *MarketMaker is a national network of State websites that connect farmers and processors with food retailers, consumers and food supply chain actors. The network has one of the most extensive collections of searchable food industry related data in the United States with over 87,000 profiles of farmers and food related enterprises in New York. The University of Illinois Extension was the first online and New York MarketMaker went live in early July 2007. Ten States (Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Kentucky, New York, Mississippi, Georgia, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio) are currently online and many other States are now under construction. The NY MarketMaker site has an initial database of over 2,000 Empire State producers. All producers registered with NY MarketMaker are asked to update their business information by mail and email. Interest by producers and retail food actors in the NY MarketMaker website is increased by showing the total number of visits per month has reached from 16,000 to 20,000 in November and December, 2007.*

**Keywords:** *Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Marketing, New York MarketMaker*

## Introduction

New York's MarketMaker website (<http://nymarketmaker.cornell.edu>) was developed and is directed by Cornell University Cooperative Extension/New York City (<http://nyc.cce.cornell.edu>). Since 1948, Extension educators in New York City have engaged in farm-to-market, food security and agricultural economic development education and outreach programs with colleagues throughout New York and the Northeast U.S. Siting MarketMaker staff ½ block from the Empire State Building maximizes exposure for MarketMaker and New York producers. Working with colleagues on Cornell's Ithaca campus, we are training and assisting agricultural entrepreneurs, value-added retailers, processors and niche food enterprises to fully utilize the potential of MarketMaker.

The partnership of land grants and state agricultural agencies is building a national network of interconnected MarketMaker sites, with 17 States expressing formal support and commitment to generate local resources for the project. Each partner state has its own unique site, but all sites access a common database, allowing users to query all states in the system. New York designs and develops its own educational outreach geared to food retail, trade and industry groups to better assist Empire State producers and their associations and teach food entrepreneurs how to use the New York State website.

## MarketMaker features

Designed to improve access by Midwest farmers to regional markets via links with processors, retailers, consumers and food supply chain actors; all information can be mapped, located or queried by the user. Built with land grant funds, the sites will be open and accessible to all on a no-fee basis. The main features MarketMaker include:

1. Customized Market Profile - users can build a personal trade area with target census tracts, summing up queries and demographic data to map and print;
2. Consumption Pattern Data- a new feature allows users to map the highest concentrations of consumer by product; and
3. Buyers and Sellers Forum- businesses can make weekly posts of available or needed food products, paving the way for potential business relationships.

## **Creating producers/farmers database for New York State**

We collected the basic producers information from different agricultural organizations such as Pride of New York, Northeast Organic Farming Association, South Central New York Agriculture Program, Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, New York Wine and Grape Foundation, New York Apple Association, and New York State Vegetable Growers Association. In addition, a database of farmers' markets, state and federally inspected processing plants were gathered.

To get the detail information on current business, we sent out structured registration forms to producers and processors by mail and email. Producers and processors throughout the New York State were asked to complete registration forms and return to us. The registration form includes business name and address, contact person, website and email address, telephone and fax numbers, product type, product attribute, product form, product sales, farm operating hours, and additional business information. Producers and processors were asked by telephone for the required additional information.

## **Developing a new Marketing Tool for New York State**

The New York MarketMaker site has an initial database of over 2,000 Empire State producers. It equals the existing four States Market Maker network. We collected and organized all producer information through early April 2007. The New York MarketMaker site went live in early July 2007. Every farmers or business registered on New York MarketMaker (Empire State Market Maker) can edit and update their own online profiles via a secure password.

The following outcomes are expected: Increased production of the new value-added quality products for sale and productivity improvements; Increased profitability at the producers and food business/enterprise level via development of expanded markets for existing and new products; Extended 'reach' of NY MarketMaker by doubling producer registration levels; and Increased currency of data by ensuring updates by/on behalf of registered producers.

## **Educational outreach activities**

We design and develop our own educational outreach geared to food retail, trade and industry groups to better assist Empire State producers and their associations and teach food entrepreneurs how to use the New York State website. The project's target audience includes individual New York producers, processors and value-added food enterprises and their respective associations. Given ready availability of 'market intelligence' for larger producers and retail food enterprises, our focus is on small producers and niche marketers lacking comparable access to this critical market information. Information are generated via educational materials, face-to-face meetings and training workshop for each group followed up by videoconferences.

We design and deliver sessions to develop specific marketing strategies for selected producers registered with MarketMaker and seek continuous improvement of NY MarketMaker website via producer involvement. Project results and impacts will be reported and widely shared throughout the New York agricultural community. We presented MarketMaker at off- season conferences and grower meetings. We hope producers, processors, food retailers, consumers, food supply chain actors, and farm business are now taking advantages of access to trade, marketing and food industry resources that can be motivated to buy direct from Empire State producers. We are planning to carry out the further research on impact assessment of New York MarketMaker, perceptions of producers and processors on their economic development via MarketMaker.