

## Creating education and training opportunities to support the development of direct marketing strategies

EVELYN JUISTER<sup>1</sup>, NINA BERNER<sup>2</sup>, ANNA MARIA HÄRING<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstract

*The increased interest towards local food provides farms engaged in direct marketing new opportunities. Therefore it will be important to highlight individual USPs with suitable marketing concepts to attract and retain loyal customers. Expertise in how to design and implement these concepts is increasingly important. However, farmers intending to market their products directly often do not have the required experiences or knowledge on how to market effectively and thus cannot take advantage of the mentioned opportunities. The aim of this research was to provide education and training actors with recommendations on which training and education offers could be made. This was achieved by identifying the education and training needs in direct marketing in terms of content and methodology and comparing these with the existing opportunities for training and education in the region of Berlin/Brandenburg. The results suggest that there are a range of knowledge gaps among direct marketing farmers. Few opportunities for training and education in agriculture and food marketing exist for these farmers in Brandenburg. For training and education providers, it is recommended to develop specific training and education concepts for direct marketing farmers, with a specific emphasis on providing a forum for sharing knowledge.*

### Introduction

In times of increasing globalisation and recurring food scandals, consumers are putting more trust in local food (BMELV 2013). This trend can be incorporated into direct marketing strategies as particularly authentic and thus offers farms engaged in direct marketing, in farm stores, at farmers market stands, etc. as well as by directly supplying retail stores, with new opportunities. However, quality-oriented food retailers have also recently taken up this trend with specifically targeted marketing concepts to differentiate themselves from discount supermarkets. In terms of direct marketing, this means that it will be important to abandon anonymity and highlight individual USPs with suitable marketing concepts to attract and retain loyal customers (Hassan 2010). Expertise in how to design and implement suitable marketing concepts is thus increasingly important for expanding regional sales and marketing capacity. However, because marketing was not originally the responsibility of producers, they are often overwhelmed by this task (Haberland et al. 2008).

The aim of this research was to provide education and training actors with recommendations on which training and education offers could be made. This was achieved by identifying the education and training needs of direct marketing farmers in terms of content and methodology by a survey and comparing these with the existing opportunities for training and education in the region of Berlin/Brandenburg. This model region features a high demand for organic products in the Berlin metropolitan region, a high percentage of organically farmed land in the surrounding area of Brandenburg but very weekly developed supply chains or direct marketing concepts (Nölting et al. 2005). In particular, the survey of direct marketing farmers analysed what knowledge producers are lacking and how they usually acquire new knowledge. A further aim was to identify suitable teaching and learning concepts and other aspects relevant to participation from the farmers' point of view. Knowledge gaps not specifically mentioned but which still potentially existed, were captured using a broader methodological approach to the educational needs analysis. From a methodological viewpoint, the challenge of finding a way to identify latent knowledge needs.

### Material and methods

The educational needs were assessed on the basis of an analysis of secondary literature, an analysis of the existing training and education opportunities, supplementary expert interviews and a telephone survey with direct marketers. The evaluation of a pilot training seminar also provided findings on the structure of teaching and learning concepts.

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<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development (University of Applied Sciences), Policy and Markets in the Agro-Food Sector, Germany, [www.hnee.de](http://www.hnee.de); [ējuister@hnee.de](mailto:ējuister@hnee.de), [anna.haering@hnee.de](mailto:anna.haering@hnee.de).

The secondary studies were initially assessed for concrete indications of knowledge gaps. Based on the result that the studies make almost no explicit assertions about knowledge gaps in marketing, we tried to indirectly assess whether knowledge deficiencies exist. To this end, relevant obstacles to sales and purchases were first described based on a study conducted by Dienel (2002). Core assertions made by Recke/Wirthgen (2004) about problem areas when establishing direct marketing were incorporated into the expanded description of relevant obstacles to sales and purchases along with key elements that contribute to the success of organic marketing initiatives (Hensche/Schleyer 2005). The respective marketing areas were assigned to the obstacles identified based on Dienel's (2002) study. Important fields of knowledge in the individual marketing areas were defined based on Meffert et al. (2008) and Becker (Becker 2002).

**Table 1: Example of sales obstacle and the conclusions that can be drawn**

Sales obstacle (perspective: producer)	Reasons it hinders sales of regional organic agricultural products	Marketing policy area	Knowledge fields
Price obstacle	Price level too low, prices not stable enough	Pricing policy and communication policy	Translation of stated goals and strategies into the individual fields of the marketing mix  Knowledge of specific practical tools  Knowledge about the selection, prioritisation, structure of the individual tools for systematic application

Source: Own research based on Dienel (2002), Recke/Wirthgen (2004), Hensche/Schleyer (2005), Meffert et al. (2008), Becker (2002)

Additional information was collected standardised telephone interviews of direct marketers. This included sociodemographic factors, business- and activity-related data as well as information about the factors that influence farmers' participation in education and training and what they are interested in learning. 39 of the 166 farms contacted took part. Data was analysed using unvaried analysis methods in the statistics program SPSS and in Excel. Mayring's methods of inductive category development were used to formulate open questions (Mayring 2010).

Regional training and education opportunities related to agriculture were analysed using online databases and the published course offerings of various training and education providers. In addition, eight interviews with experts supplemented the analysis of the existing opportunities for training and education.

**Results**

The analysis of the secondary literature identified various obstacles to sales and purchases. The corresponding fields of knowledge in marketing were derived on this basis, which then provided an initial idea of potential training and educational needs. The sales obstacles identified, for example, suggest infrastructural characteristics unique to the region and indirectly indicate a need for networking between the various actors in the value chain. The purchase obstacles identified indicate knowledge gaps in how to translate goals and strategies to the individual fields of the marketing mix and the selection, prioritisation and structuring of the individual marketing tools. Conclusions were also drawn about knowledge gaps that affect the acquisition and analysis of relevant information.

Compared to other Federal States in Germany, there are few opportunities in Brandenburg for training and education in agriculture and food marketing for farms engaged in direct marketing. Even though more than half of the farmers surveyed said they had participated in training and education in the last three years, training mainly focused on production-related topics. This trend is also evident in our analysis of available opportunities for training and education. They focus primarily on issues related to production, agricultural policy and business management. Marketing training was offered only sporadically. The organisers usually identified the topics to be addressed without performing a systematic needs analysis ahead of time. The

farmers surveyed mainly showed interest in strategic and interdisciplinary topics such as business development, EU and national law, human resource and time management, as well as marketing. In the field of marketing, the interviewees expressed particular interest in business and operational themes in the marketing mix as well as in general market information.

The training and education opportunities on offer are mainly held in seminar format (as learning formats with a practically-oriented context and a platform for sharing experiences). For farmers the preferred format for training and education in addition to informational events, lectures and courses of study is discussing experiences with colleagues. In addition, books, journals, the internet, farming associations were identified as relevant to knowledge acquisition.

The most important factors influencing participation in training and education were:

- Time (February is the best time)
- Content (combination of theory and practice)
- Trainer/teacher (practical knowledge)
- Experience with the training and education provider
- Fees (little willingness to pay)
- Venue (on-farm)
- Distance to the location of the event (in Brandenburg max. 100 to 150 km)
- Farms' awareness of problems
- Ability to leave the farm due to farm staff

## Discussion and conclusions

Knowledge gaps in marketing were identified in the model region. The current training and education opportunities only sporadically address these knowledge gaps. Systematically structured training and education opportunities in the field of marketing for direct marketers which, in particular, adequately incorporated farmers' need to share experiences with colleagues were not identified. For training and education providers, the study concludes that the training and education on offer should be adapted to the influential factors above and the respective concepts should, in particular, offer a solid platform for farmers to adequately share knowledge. The next step will be to work closely with the relevant training and education providers to develop and further test corresponding options for training and education in Brandenburg.

The methodological analysis shows that an indirect needs analysis of sales and purchase obstacles can be useful to complement other methods of educational needs analysis because it can provide an initial idea of where latent knowledge gaps may exist and in which areas. Assessing the knowledge gaps identified by means of a direct survey of direct marketers proved useful.

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