

*Promoting today's farming innovations...
 Ensuring tomorrow's family farms.*

Meet your new board members

Three fresh faces joined the NAFDMA board of directors in January

NAFDMA's board of directors welcomed three new members at a brief board meeting in January 2006. At the same meeting, it said goodbye to Wayne Bishop (Southwest), Kay Hollabaugh (Northeast) and Vickie Parker-Clark (Northwest).

Here's a brief introduction to your new board members. Their contact information, as well as all other board members, is listed on page 2 of each newsletter and is also available at www.nafdma.com. Don't

be shy about contacting them. They want to hear from you!

Anne Holcomb, Southwest

A desire for country life led Anne and John Holcomb to purchase 20 acres in Willcox, Ariz. At the time, John's parents were looking for an investment, so they decided to plant apples.

As it turns out, the Holcombs learned that although they could grow the best tasting, sweet apples, they weren't as pretty as more northern-grown fruit.

"We turned to u-pick, and it exploded," says Anne. "We love what we do."

A neighbor's vegetable farm complemented their fruit. The Holcombs added a burger barn, field trips and more to their farm. "A lot of things we learned through NAFDMA," says Anne.

Their neighbors recently sold the vegetable farm to the Holcombs, and their son manages the vegetables. Their daughter, Mandy, is not as involved as she once was, although she still handles publicity and helps out on weekends.

With two locations a few miles apart, Anne estimates that about 75 percent of their customers visit both farms. She works on cross promotions.

"For example, with their change we hand them a map and a list of what we have at the other location," she says. "It has worked very well, and it's exciting to see our son managing his own place."

This year is a fine-tuning year at Apple Annie's. They'll continue to work on what will be their fourth Pumpkin Festival. Anne says they're also working on a children's play area.

"We're always looking for new baked goods," she says. "We're expanding school tours by about a third."

Anne's school tours are currently maxed out at 6,000. She says they'll add more staff and wagons; the apple school will add a tent and seating.

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Here's an idea...



Labyrinths are becoming increasingly popular. This one is at The Natural Gardener in Austin, Texas. A tipi is nearby. The labyrinth was made with low-growing ornamental grasses. In more northern climates, consider interplanting with spring bulbs such as daffodils or tulips.

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2 *North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association*

Rob Leeds wins Leadership Award

Rob Leeds, a farmer and extension agent from Ostrander, Ohio, has received the 2005 Outstanding Leadership Award from NAFDMA.

Leeds and his wife, Christy, son, Isaac, and parents, Bob and Gayle Leeds, own and operate Leeds Farm.

Leeds Farm is a small fall produce/entertainment farm catering to families with children under 13 years of age and focusing on the fall harvest. "The main draws to the farm are the farm animals and the children's play barn," says Leeds.

Leeds has been a leader in promoting farm direct marketing in his home state of Ohio for more than 15 years as an educator for Ohio State University Extension. He serves as an advisor to the Ohio Direct Marketing Association and has been instrumental in mentoring other educators to better serve Ohio's farm direct marketing and agritourism industry.

Leeds is an active member of NAFDMA and has served on its board of directors since 1997. He has served as the association's treasurer, has led the Conference Committee, and continues to serve on the executive committee as president. Leeds is known among



his peers in NAFDMA for his fairness in deliberating issues and unwavering support of the national farming community.

"Rob always has the interests of the hard working farmers at heart," says Charlie Touchette, executive director of NAFDMA. "He champions their cause internationally, and he shares innovative strategies gained in his travels with his neighbors back home."

"Considering the quality of leadership in this industry, it's a tremendous honor to receive this from my NAFDMA peers across the United States, Canada and Great Britain," says Leeds.

Learn more about Leeds Farm at www.leedsfarm.com.

Be part of the next
NAFDMA/MSU survey.
Get the details in the May issue
of *Market Connection*.

Learn from these trends

At our annual conference in January, we heard some trend predictions and their implications from two leaders in the farm direct marketing industry.

Brent Warner, B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, and Ed Mahoney, Michigan State University, were the keynote speakers at our annual conference in Austin, Texas. As part of their presentation, they served up some of their predictions for industry trends and their implications for farm direct marketers. Here are some of their trends.

Trend: The aging of our population, coupled with persons wanting to stay fit and healthier to an older age, will increase the demand for farm market products and tourism experiences including fruits, vegetables, nostalgia and “things to do” with their friends and families.

Implications: Seniors have disposable income, like to experience new things and are fond of getting back to the

farm. More are looking for interesting second careers and part-time jobs.

Providing products, packaging, access and service expected by this market, avoiding stereotyping the market, and how to employ some of these very skilled individuals in my business.

Trend: 50 million more food consumers in the U.S. by 2020.

Food spending is projected to increase by more than 26%.

The greatest part of that increase represented by spending in enhanced quality and convenience, not quantity of food.

Implications: More food and tourism spending on customer-oriented, value-added products and experiences including fresh, healthy and prepared foods, and dining out.

Position to profitably capture a larger share of the

value-added food and tourism-related spending by developing regional loyalties based on quality and not trying to compete on price.

Trend: Nutrition and wellness will be increasingly important to a growing segment of food and tourism markets.

“Let food be thy medicine and let thy medicine be thy food” Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine (460-377 B.C.)

Implications: Legislatively determined food choices may be implemented to combat childhood obesity.

Increased spending on locally produced and processed food and more stability of demand.

New markets that require locally grown food including schools, institutions, public and private food programs

Trend: Food security and safety will continue as a major concern and

will provoke changes in farming, processing and labeling.

Implications: Local food systems and producers must be incorporated as important elements of a more secure food system

Focusing on results and not building another bureaucracy while still ensuring the delivery of safe products.

These local more secure food systems must be constructed to benefit local farmers and ranchers.

Trend: Competition for increased spending on food and recreation/tourism dollars will intensify and will be in a continuous state of transition.

Implications: Larger retailers will bypass potentially profitable market segments. Com-

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Fresh ideas for family farms.

New board members

Continued from front page

"I love school field trips and working with children," she says. "Most have never seen fruit growing on a tree or pumpkins on vines."

Anne manages the bakery, gift buying and office/administrative work. John handles the growing and some employee management. They both oversee sales, put out fires and help where needed.

"I love being able to share our farm and our lifestyle with people," says Anne. "We provide fun things for them to do but this is still a working farm. It's our purpose and ministry in life."

As a new board member, Ann hopes to represent more rural farms that are destinations and not at the fringes of cities.

"NAFDMA has such diversity of members," she says. "I have a heart for small farmers."

Sue Roba, Northeast

Roba's Family Farms, Dalton, Pa., began in 1984, when John Roba purchased a 52-acre dairy farm. Through the years, John and Sue planted trees, and the farm grew to 100 acres. They also diversified the farm to offer plenty of family fun in the fall and winter.

The farm's fall season runs for seven weeks, from mid September to Halloween. They reopen the day after Thanksgiving and are open until Christmas Eve.

Farm activities include campfires, a corn maze, pig races, Bunnyville, a chicken show and the Kiddie Kattle Train. The farm hosts school tours and scout/youth groups as well as birthday parties.

Sue says that this year they'll

be adding peddle carts and a track to the farm.

People pay admission to the farm. Last year admission was \$6. People can also buy season passes, which were \$18 per person.

"We've offered season passes for four years, and it's grown each year," says Sue. Many at-home moms like to buy season passes to allow them to come with their kids for a few hours during the week or even weekends.

"A lot of people still thrive on crowds," she says. Some people who are used to the bustle of a crowded weekend find it too quiet on weekdays. Others only come on weekdays.

The Robas have three children. Jennifer, 25 and out on her own, helps out occasionally. Their sons, Jeff (14) and Jake (12) are very involved, says Sue.

"They work all year on the farm," she says. "They plant, mow and shear, and they have jobs and duties in season such as cashiering."

Sue has an accounting degree, and although she is full-time on the farm, she works "very part time" for an engineering firm. She also does some tax-season accounting.

"I hope to bring some new ideas to the board and help expand on where we are going," she says.

Jan Vala, Northwest

"It was Tim's dream to have his own business and have people come to the farm," says Jan Vala, Gretna, Neb. "This was back in the '80s when pick-your-own was in its heyday."

Jan says they started with strawberries, but that didn't last long.

"By chance, we found that people liked to come and pick pumpkins," she says. Tim observed that people seemed to enjoy themselves, and they expanded their fall activities. The strawberries soon gave way to more pumpkins.

This year will be the Vala's 21st year. They started with one employee, and now Jan manages 375 employees during the fall season.

The Valas grow 50 acres of pumpkins on their 152-acre farm. They devote 20 acres to parking.

Cash registers and employees are spread all over the farm. Jan says they have two ATMs on the farm.

"We bought a new one last fall," she says. They charge \$1 per transaction, and she says the machine didn't quite pay for itself the first season.

"Some things you do to make money, some you do for customer convenience," she says.

The ATM is one element of customer convenience. Another is bathrooms.

The new bathrooms allow the Valas to expand into motor coach tours. Jan says they installed 13 stalls for women and four for men, plus a family bathroom with a baby changing station.

"We really had a need for it," she says.

The Valas moved in a barn, which will allow them to expand their retail area at the exit. Jan is in charge of the retail part of the business, marketing and hiring of staff members.

Jan and Tim have three daughters; one is in high school, another in college and another in graduate school.

Now that her kids are older, Jan says she's at a time in life when she thought she could contribute to the NAFDMA board of directors.

"From the outside looking in, everything always seems to run so smoothly," she says. She's ready to bring her own ideas to the table, help present a top-notch conference and help keep everything running smoothly.

Miss the conference?

Audio tape recordings
are available for workshops,
keynotes and concurrent sessions.

Please visit
www.nafdma.com/Market/Audio/
and click on 2006 Conference.
Past years are also still available
for purchase.



by Rob Leeds
President

One of the great things about farm marketing is that there is always room for new creative ideas. And, those ideas can come from anyone, anywhere at anytime. Sure when we go to the NAFDMA Conference, gift shows, or the groceries association meetings we expect to get some ideas for activities, products, marketing or new farm experiences, and we do. There are also several industry publications like *Vegetable Grower News, Alberta*

Agri-preneur, and of course the NAFDMA newsletter that give us good information. But an exciting part of finding inspiration for new ideas is finding them in arenas that have nothing to do with farming or direct marketing.

At Leeds Farm, many of our ideas and contacts for our play area have come my wife Christy's involvement with the American Camp Association (ACA). I really appreciate ACA information, especially when it comes to making our farm safer. Most direct marketers need to keep our farms safe for people who come out for the day. Most camps must be responsible for child safety for weeks, sometimes months, at a time. It is great to be able to learn from an industry that must place a priority on many aspects of safety involving chil-

dren, families, and adventure activities.

I came across an interesting article in Ad Age.com talking about how GM "drafted" on Ford's Super Bowl ad. The article talked about how Ford had spent over \$2.5 million using Kermit the Frog to advertise their new hybrid vehicle (the Escape) during the Super Bowl. The article credited GM

with purchasing the "Kermit" search listing on Google so that search results would place GM's Flexfuel vehicles at the top of the listings. In the second slot on the sponsored links was Ford's Escape, but unfortunately, sometimes 2nd place is too far down the list. Many people who saw the commercial did not remember the exact product the spokes-

coverages, it also had an interesting article on sound system advancements. Who would have thought coaches needed help to yell louder. This year sound systems were a discussion topic lead by Hugh McPherson on the A1 NAFDMA tour, and it has been an area of interest for our farming operation.

On the flip side, maybe some other industries should look at farm direct marketing for inspirations. I read an article that quoted Steven J. Heyer, CEO of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, as saying that under his new marketing plan at Starwood, the company's product is no longer viewed as the sale of rooms in hotels. Instead, he said, "We sell experiences. We deliver memories." If he had been to a NAFDMA conference, he could have learned that 10 years ago.

So as you read and travel, be sure to look out for those ideas in everyday places. Sure there will always be the great NAFDMA conferences, but be sure you don't overlook those nuggets of inspirations in the most unlikely places. For example, based on reading the latest issue of *Popular Science*, I am sure there is something we can do with flying cars and virtual reality air guitar.

“On the flip side, maybe some other industries should look at **farm direct marketing for inspirations.**”

frog pitched, and therefore clicked on the first car-related link that came up. In this case, it was GM that put itself in that 1st position. While not many of us are going to be buying ads on the Super Bowl, this lesson raises some interesting ideas about the use of technology to market our farms.

As some of you know, I also coach junior high football, so I subscribe to a Coach's magazine. This month along with the articles on kick return schemes, strength training and game planning your defensive

Fire in corn mazes...Read it!

One of the cover stories of the February 2006 issue of *Vegetable Growers News* is titled "Fire is the ultimate nightmare for corn maze operators."

The article, by Dick Lehnert, discusses past incidents and offers suggestions as to what you can do to prevent a tragedy happening on your farm. Be sure to read it!

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After more than 30 years, Ernie still loves his rubber ducky. What child doesn't? And what child, whatever the age, can resist the combination of rubber ducks and flowing water?

Rubber duck races can be a low-cost entertainment option. They're easy to build, they don't require much supervision, and they're just plain fun!

The basic components of a rubber duck race are the flumes, pumps, water holding tanks, some hoses and, of course, the rubber ducks! Below, we'll take a look at two different designs. They accomplish the same goal—allowing people to pump water that pushes the ducks down the flume.

pumps are attached to a wooden platform that runs across one tank.

The end trough is fitted with a 1¼" spray tank fitting at the bottom. A 1¼" hose gravity flows back to the tank with the pumps.

"I added a second hose, because with four kids pumping water, one can't keep up," says Dan.

Dan supports the flumes in the middle to keep them flat so that the force of the water is what moves the ducks. He initially used wooden posts to support the



flumes, but they sagged. Now metal angle iron keeps the flumes level. He checks them at the beginning of the season and

adjusts them if needed. The structure is solid, with the posts buried in the ground.

Pea gravel below the tanks eliminate mud problems.

When field trips visit Dewberry Farm, they have competitions between teams of children or teachers.

"The children can see that physical action makes something happen," says Dan. He also notes that adults like the competitive aspect of it.

Wayne Bishop, Bishop's Pumpkin Farm, Wheatland, Calif., says they constructed their unit out of sheet metal, mainly because they're used to working with it. Wayne and Dan agree that the flumes could also be built out of wood.

Wayne offers these design points:

"Track should be level and needs to have a dam at the end so that you get about an inch of water in the track before it starts overflowing. The ducks need that much water in order to float. We also pump into a calming basin that in turn overflows into the track, allowing for a more even flow of water. We drain the track after each race with a bathtub plug so that

Above: Dewberry Farm; left: Bishop's Pumpkin Farm

the next pumper has to fill the track again, otherwise the race would be over with really fast.

"The pumps tend to lose prime easily. You can prevent this by changing their suction tubes to PVC and adding an inexpensive check valve to the bottom. Also, figure on putting new pumps on or rebuilding them every year, because the cylinder will rust and then destroy the piston seal. Someone who visited us on the tour told me he sells his worn out pumps in his gift shop as garden decor.

"We probably spent three or four hundred dollars and about 40 man-hours on ours."

Wayne and Dan both built a roof over their units. Consider the weather in your area and how you'll use the races to determine how large a roof to build.

Sources

Rubber Ducks

www.makesparties.com, Oriental Trading Company and many others

Hand press pumps

Northern Tool + Equipment: www.northerntool.com

Trends and implications

Continued from page 3

petition can help farmers and ranchers enhance their products and experiences!

Grow/process and create products and experiences with a high degree of newness and a holistic concern for customers.

Value-centric farm/ranch branding, differentiated private label products, product innovation will all be more important in differentiating and positioning.

Trend: Farmers' Markets across the country are diversifying—entertainment, ready-to-eat foods, non-farm vendors.

The most successful farmers' markets continue to focus on farmers or even on locally-grown food.

Implications: Urban farmers' markets as incubators.

Social and economic anchors for communities

Trend: Restaurant customers who are interested in menus that promote and support sustainable agriculture.

Chef-farmer relationships will continue to grow!

Implications: Special dinners, menus and restaurants focusing on local farms and food producers.

Chefs will be more engaged in the growing process – some will be co-producers!

Chefs will be leading supporters of local agriculture and farm(ers') markets.

Trend: States and provinces will increasingly seek and pursue integrated economic development opportunities and partnerships that encourage and

support multiple industries – agriculture and tourism – and produce positive and sustainable local economic impacts.

Implications: Agricultural and tourism agencies, and local economic development agencies, will increasingly recognize AgriTourism as economic engines for rural development.

A bottom-up approach to AgriTourism development and marketing, aligning laws and

regulations to support its development, investment financing, creating new marketing coalitions.

Trend: Tourism markets, even those interested in nostalgia and “real” rural experiences, will demand luxury, safety and convenience.

Implications: AgriTourism must raise the bar. Second rate is not good enough. The competition is too tough.

Where's Charlie?



Charlie Touchette, NAFDMA's executive director, was last seen serving margaritas in Texas. At the time, he was disguised as a Canadian. If you've seen Charlie, please alert the White Loaf Ridge staff... Just kidding! We hope that many of you got to hear Charlie speak during his recent travels through Canada. In the photo above, Team Alberta, which is planning the 2008 convention, had fun teaching Charlie how to dress like a Canadian during the grand finale session. That was before the margaritas!



Top: At Devine Acres in Devine, Texas, Ken and Debi Capps located the play area in the shade beneath magnificent live oaks. Above: Christy Leeds is joined by Jake and Jeff Roba for a rhino encounter at Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch in Texas. See more pictures from the bus tour at www.nafdma.com/!



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Thank you
for renewing
your NAFDMA
membership!

Calendar

March 27-29, Colorado

Southwest Marketing Network Conference, Doubletree Hotel, Grand Junction, Colo.

Contact: Le Adams, 505-473-1004 or e-mail ladams@cybermesa.com.

March 31, California

Agritourism & Nature Tourism in California, Ceago del Lago, Nice, Calif.

For more information, call 707-463-4495 or e-mail cemendocino@ucdavis.edu.

April 2-3, Vermont

Stories from the Soil Workshop: Exploring Growth on your Farm, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vt.

Contact: Julia Hammond at 802-985-8686 ext. 41.

April 4, Illinois

Tanners Orchard Caramel Event, Tanners Orchard, Speer, Ill. Call 309-493-5442. Register by March 15.

April 5, Massachusetts

New England Produce & Floral Expo, Boston Convention Exhibition Center, Boston, Mass.

Contact: Laura Sullivan, 781-273-0444, nepc2@rcn.com.

April 6-8, New York

Hands-On Cheese Making workshop featuring Peter Dixon at Evans Farmhouse Creamery, Norwich, N.Y. Workshop geared for beginners interested in producing and marketing cheese from farm. Cost is \$300, includes light breakfast, lunch,

snacks, handouts and recipes. Registration due by March 28. Call 607-316-3249 or e-mail rjs58@cornell.edu.

April 17-19, Vermont

Artisan Cheese Practices Course: French Cheeses, Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese, Burlington, Vermont

Contact: Jody Farnham, at jfarnham@uvm.edu or 802-656-8300, or visit www.uvm.edu/~viac/.

May 7-9, Oregon

Strengthening Rural Community Food Systems, Eastern Oregon University, LaGrande, Oregon

May 7-9, Illinois

United 2006 Produce Expo & Conference, McCormick Place, Chicago, Ill.

Call 202-303-3400 or e-mail info@uffva.org or visit www.uffva.org.

May 11-12, New York

How to Create Successful Markets Workshop, Project for Public Spaces, New York, N.Y.

Contact: Chris Heitmann, 212-620 5660 or cheitmann@pps.org.

June 6, Illinois

Tanners Orchard Caramel Event, Tanners Orchard, Speer, Ill. Call 309-493-5442. Register by May 15.

June 11-17, Mexico

International Fruit Tree Association Summer Orchard Tour to Mexico. Two tour options; all tours depart from El Paso, Texas. Visit www.ifruittree.org for details.