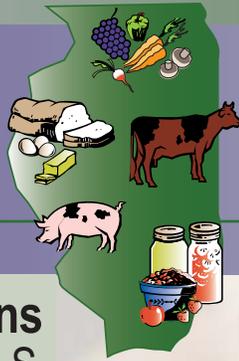




## IDEA



Fall 2006

## NEWS &amp; VIEWS

Initiative for the Development of Entrepreneurs in Agriculture

Marketing to Raving Fans  
YOUR CUSTOMERS

**Marketing your produce and products – Why will people buy from you rather than your competition?** In this issue of News & Views we look at two farm families that have been in the marketing business for years. The first is the Nichols Farm and Orchard which since 1978, have grown their business by following their motto “Variety is our Specialty”. The other featured “family farm” is AquaRanch Industries who have been promoting Aqua culture and Aquaponics since 1985. As “Raving Fans” author Ken Blanchard puts it “The most important product in every business is service. People remember great service; unfortunately, they remember poor service even more. Customer satisfaction is a make-it-or-break-it aspect of business. It can only be achieved by a commitment to customer service with a common sense approach, which begins with three secrets: First, decide what you want; Second, discover what the customer wants; and Third, deliver the vision plus one percent.

Also in this issue we are providing an update of the exciting things that have been happening with our MarketMaker program which is connecting Farmers, Processors, Food Retailers and Consumers. Plus in this issue we have a news flash on the up coming Organic Production and Marketing Strategies Conferences.

## What's Inside

Nichols Farm & Orchard	1
Aquaculture Ranch	2
Marketing Conference – News Flash	2
MarketMaker Matching Producers to Customers	3
Questions & Answers	4
Cool Links	4

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Nichols Farm & Orchard *Story referred by Don Schellhaass*

The Nichols (Lloyd, Doreen and sons Nick, Todd and Chad) were not always market gardeners. Lloyd had always loved to garden and began selling vegetables out of the trunk of his car at work while he and wife Doreen continued to work for an airline company that has since went out of business. They built their own jobs with their farm & orchard. After seeing the loyalty of his customers, Lloyd began to have a larger vision. In 1978 the family moved from the city out to Marengo, Illinois where they purchased a small ten acre piece of land. This was the same season they began to sell in the Evanston Farmers Market. The warm welcome of our great customers every spring has kept us coming back. Nichols Farm & Orchard has grown to more than 300 acres and they attend at least 14 weekly farmers markets. It is to our “regulars” and everyone else’s support of locally grown fruits and vegetables that their website ([www.nicholsfarm.com](http://www.nicholsfarm.com)) is dedicated to.



Todd, Doreen, Nick, Chad, and Lloyd holding Aiden

After 28 years of market gardening, the Nichols family is more dedicated than ever to their customers. **As Ken Blanchard states in “Raving Fans”** the Nichols have ...

**First, decided what they wanted** – “A Farm Market” driven business where they sell at the market and not from the farm. This gives them a more focused business in that they are selling and listening to their customers at the market. And then on the farm they can turn their full attention to do their farm planning and production work.

**Second, they discover (every day) what their customers’ want** - they feel that their customer is looking for someone that they know and understand what their philosophy in raising fresh, wholesome, nutritional foods in many varieties. As an example from listening to their customers the Nichols provide over 10 different varieties of corn, 30 different varieties of tomatoes and more than a 120 different varieties of apples; and

**Third, deliver the vision plus one percent** - they are always asking and listening to their customers so that they can give the customer what they want plus something more along with a smile.

They have evolved their business into one based on the premise that the customer is always right, and give them what they want, from this the Nichols have developed their business slogan “Variety is our Specialty”.

Over the years the Nichols have given back to their community in many ways, i.e. a wonderful variety of fruits and produce and by helping to educate other producers that want to sell into farmers’ markets. Many of the other farmers at the market view Lloyd as the patriarch, that when asked will give a suggestion on how to improve their activity.

In addition the Nichols have been presenters at various Value-added or Alternative Ag workshops. They have actually created a presentation called "Farmers Markets – The Psychology of Selling, What is Your Approach – Educator – Cook- Economist" They will be one of the presenters at this year's University of Illinois' Marketing Strategies Conference to be held in Bloomington, IL. December 6th and 7th.

**A part of their presentation is called:**

Salesmanship  
Remember to smile.

The customer is always right!  
Are your employees on message? "Your story"  
Does everyone have an owner's enthusiasm?  
How do you present yourself every week?

What's your script?  
Figure out what works & be consistent!

Markets offer the purest form of market research –  
refine your approach.

Please go to their web site ([www.nicholsfarm.com](http://www.nicholsfarm.com)) to learn more about the Nichols. The web site also provides a schedule of ("2006 Farmer Markets Updated") of when and where they will be at one of the 15 different markets that they attend. They are always wanting to create more "Raving Fans" as does Myles Harston of AquaRanch Industries.



# NEWS FLASH

**The 3rd Annual Production and Marketing Conference, "A Recipe for Success,"** is being held on Dec 6th & 7th in Bloomington. Please look at the enclosed flyer and/or go to the web site...

<http://asap.aces.uiuc.edu/orgconf>  
for more information  
and to register.

# AquaRanch Industries

Story by Kim Tack



Tilapia swimming in tank.

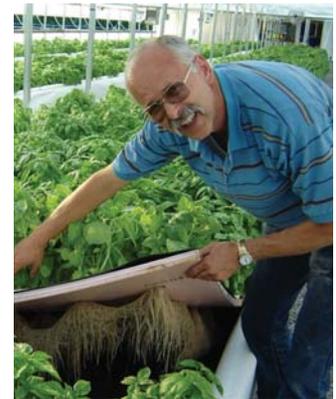
AquaRanch owner, Myles Harston has an Aquaponic Farm "Aquaponics" is simply the combination of aquaculture (fish farming) and hydroponics (growing plants without soil). Myles has embraced Ken Blarchard's "Raving Fans" approach to his business endeavors for years, (First, decide what you want; Second, discover what the customer wants; and Third, deliver the vision plus one percent more.)

Myles decided long ago that he wanted to own his own business. This started for Myles when he owned a company (in 1985) that provided plastic covers for large

grain bunkers. When the government stopped providing subsidies for grain storage he turned his knowledge of plastics toward the business of providing plastic liners for "aquaculture".

Aquaculture is the cultivation of aquatic animals and plants for human use or consumption. During the period of 1985 through 2004 AquaRanch Industries grew it's consulting, supply and educational business. In 2005 Myles added another dimension to his growing business by building his own aquaculture facility in Flannigan, IL. (about a 110 miles South of Chicago on Interstate 55). Please go to <http://www.aquaranch.com/argreenhouse.htm> to view the pictures of the building of their aquaculture and hydroponics facility. Nature has combined aquaculture and hydroponics to sustain life long before dinosaurs roamed the earth. That same natural, sustainable process is being utilized at AquaRanch Industries where the fish and plants thrive through an interconnected water system. "We basically feed the fish and the fish feed the plants. The plants clean the water through their extensive root system. It's a symbiotic relationship very much like the one found in nature," explained Myles.

Myles had done his home work and knew that he had a market for both the tilapia and basil that he was going to raise. He discovered what his customers wanted was good quality naturally grown pollutant free fish and greens. With his closed system he does not have to concern himself the oceans' pollutes or field run-off into farm ponds. Part of his marketing effort has been to educate his customers to these this basic benefits. After this he delivers the vision plus one percent. The one percent is the idea that you give your customer what they want plus one percent more. The customer doesn't expect this and they find this a pleasing surprise. The one percent is the idea that it is a lot easier to make small incremental improvement rather betting the farm on some quantum leap in product or service.



Basil ready for Market

One of Myles' marketing research activities was to attend the University of Illinois' 2nd Annual Marketing Strategies for Customer Driven Agriculture Conference in Dec of 2005. Chad Nichols of Nichols Farm (see story on page 1) also was an attendee of the 2005 Marketing Strategies Conference. This year Myles will also be a presenter at The 2006 Production / Marketing Conference that is scheduled for December 6 and 7 in Bloomington. Please see the enclosed flyer for details.

Now in 2006 while still focusing on creating "Raving Fans" Myles is working to making a quantum leap (after having listened to his customers) by building a processing facility to prepare fresh and /or frozen tilapia fillets. This will allow Myles to add another product to his business by providing the convenience of fillets rather than having a customer purchase a whole fish. This will also provide a product that is easy to handle and market for grocery stores and restaurants. Please be sure to visit the AquaRanch website ... [www.aquaranch.com](http://www.aquaranch.com) to learn more.

# MarketMaker: An Electronic Network that Connects Farmers, Processors, Food Retailers and Consumers.

Background-MarketMaker was developed as an online marketing resource to give Illinois farmers greater access to regional markets by linking them with processors, retailers, consumers and other food supply chain participants. It is currently one of the most extensive collections of searchable food industry related data in the country and contains over 65,000 profiles of farmers and other food related enterprises in Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. All the information can be mapped and queried by the user. The site was created by a team of University of Illinois Extension researchers with the intention of building an electronic infrastructure that would more easily connect food producing farmers with economically viable new markets and aid in the development of quality driven food supply chains. The project was funded by the Illinois Department of Agriculture, University of Illinois Extension, and the Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research (C-FAR).



Market Maker

Creating a National Food Marketing Data Base - Taking the single state concept and expanding it into a regional and national model would significantly grow the economic impact of this marketing resource. A multi-state partnership of land grant institutions and state agricultural agencies has formed to build a national network of interconnected MarketMaker sites. Seventeen states have expressed their support and a willingness to commit local resources for the project and would be the first states on-line with this new network of consumer and food industry data. The Iowa MarketMaker site came on-line in early 2006 <http://ia.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/> and the Nebraska MarketMaker site was released in the summer of 2006. <http://ne.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>

Included in the partnership is Cornell University Extension. New York's participation, in addition to Illinois, will allow users to access marketing information from two of four largest consumer markets in the United States.

Strategy for Building the Electronic Infrastructure- The MarketMaker project team is building a platform that accommodates a multi-state application, allowing speedier downloads of data. They will also formally evaluate the current site and determine improvements that would make the interface as user friendly as possible. Each partner state has their own unique site, but all sites access a common database. This allows for users to query all states in the system. Each state creates their own educational outreach program that would teach food entrepreneurs how to use the site and the basics of marketing value added food products.

## PARTNER STATES/ UNIVERSITIES

(as of 09/06):

Illinois	Iowa
Indiana	Michigan
Nebraska	Colorado
New York	New Jersey
Kentucky	Pennsylvania
Massachusetts	Ohio
Vermont	North Carolina
Mississippi	Georgia
South Carolina	



Illinois MarketMaker URL: [www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu](http://www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu)

Questions  
and  
Answers

## How do I get people to buy my products?

You have to quickly be able to communicate the benefit that the customer will realize by buying from you. To this end The North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (nafdma) can provide you with a network of other producers from around the country to use as a sounding board as to what works and what does not work. Please peruse nafdma web site [www.nafdma.com](http://www.nafdma.com) for idea's. In addition you can use MarketMaker to find producers from around the nation that you can emulate (as long as you don't encroach on their customer base.) [www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu](http://www.marketmaker.uiuc.edu)

## COOL LINKS

**"Story Selling in the Connected Economy"**. If you can articulate someone's problem and then share helpful, friendly advice, you can build instant credibility. You will position yourself as the kind of person that people want to do business with. You will become the trusted advisor. <http://www.mindblazer.com/OB1.htm> Walk around a farmers market or watch a few tv commercials to see story selling in action.

**"Raving Fans"** by Ken Blanchard, uses a brilliantly simple and charming story to teach how to define a service vision, learn what a customer really wants, institute effective systems, and make stunning customer service a competitive advantage—not just another "flavor of the month" program. <http://www.kenblanchard.com/solutions/organizational/ravingfans>

**"Growing for Market"** a national journal - is America's resource of information about growing and selling vegetables, fruits, herbs, flowers, and plants. GFM is a monthly journal about small-scale farming, sustainable agriculture and farm direct marketing. It covers farmers markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture, and selling locally to restaurants, supermarkets, natural food stores and florists. [www.growingformarket.com](http://www.growingformarket.com)

**The New American Farmer Profiles of Agricultural Innovation** <http://www.sare.org/publications/naf2/naf2.pdf> an online tour of Ag-Entrepreneurs from across the country.