

# Tools & Techniques for Doing Market Research

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# Why Market Research Matters & Where You'll Use it

- Reduces guesswork and risk
- Helps you:
  - Price with confidence
  - Choose the right products
  - Select the best markets
- Especially important for:
  - Value-added products
  - New markets
  - Business growth

## You'll Use Market Research in

- Business plan
- Marketing Plan
- Decisions about
  - which products to grow and sell
  - where & how to sell your products
  - how much to charge
- Social Media Plan/Calendar
- Advertisement Messaging
- Brand Development & Messaging
- Website Design...

# What Market Research Is (And isn't)

## Market research IS:

- Asking better questions
- Observing buyers and markets
- Using data you already have

## Market research is NOT:

- Expensive
- Academic
- One-time

Most farms already do this—just informally

# Start With the Right Questions

**Market research starts with decisions, not data**

## Common Decisions:

- Add a new product?
- Raise prices?
- Enter wholesale?
- Drop a slow seller?

## Turn decisions into questions:

- “Who already buys something like this?”
- “What problem does my product solve?”

# Primary Research = Talking to Customers

- Best information comes from people who buy from you
- Low-cost, high-value methods:
  - Conversations
  - Surveys
  - Sales data
- Can be done:
  - At markets
  - On-farm
  - Online
  - At checkout





# Informal Customer Conversations

Where to talk to customers:

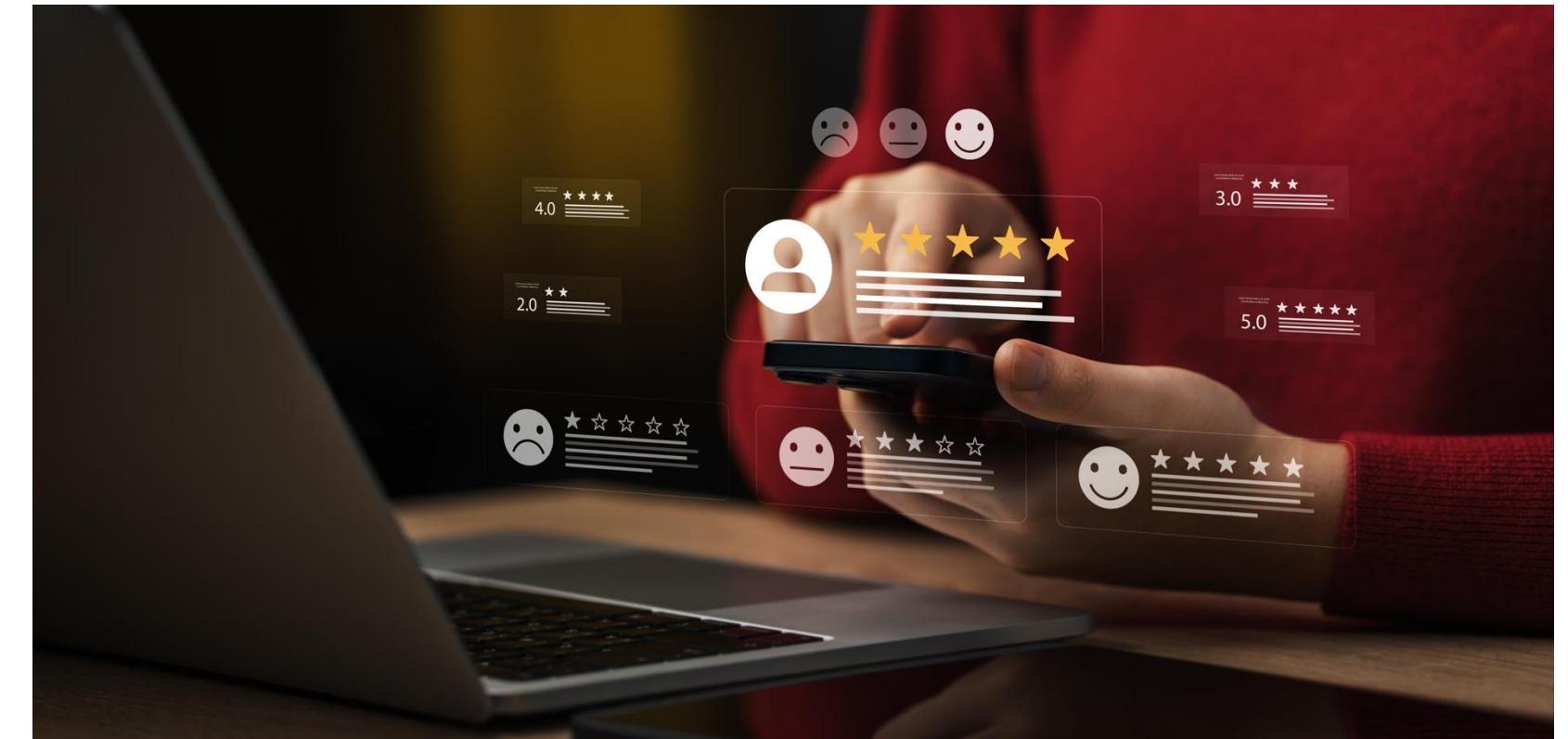
- Farmers markets
- Farm stands
- CSA pickups
- Events

High-value questions:

- “How did you hear about us?”
- “What do you usually buy instead?”
- “What almost stopped you from buying?”

Look for patterns, not one-off comments

# Surveys & Feedback Tools



## Free or Low-Cost Tools

- Google Forms
- Paper surveys
- QR codes on signage or receipts

## Best Practices

- 5–8 questions max
- Ask about behavior, not opinions
- One clear goal per survey

## Incentives

Drawings, small freebies, early access

# Your Sales Data is Market Research

You already collect data:

- Best sellers
- Slow movers
- Sell-out timing
- Repeat customers

Simple tools:

- POS reports (Square, etc.)
- Cash logs
- Spreadsheets

Ask:

- What sells fastest?
- What sits?
- What requires explanation?





# Secondary Research = Using Existing Data

- You don't have to start from scratch
- Secondary research helps:
  - Validate ideas
  - Spot trends
  - Support funding or grants
- Especially useful for:
  - New products
  - Wholesale decisions
  - Expansion planning

# Kentucky Specific Data Sources

University of  
Kentucky  
Cooperative  
Extension

Enterprise budgets  
& marketing guides

Center for  
Crop  
Diversification  
(UK)

Crop profiles &  
market outlooks

Kentucky  
Department of  
Agriculture

KY Proud & market  
programs

Kentucky State  
University  
Extension

Small farm & value-  
added research

USDA Census  
of Agriculture  
(KY Data)

# Kentucky Market & Consumer Data

Kentucky  
Farmers Market  
Manual

Market & Vendor  
Trends

KY Center for Ag  
& Rural  
Development  
(KCARD)

Value-added business  
planning & market  
readiness

Kentucky Policy  
Institute

SNAP/WIC and food  
access data

Community  
Farm Alliance

?????

# Competitor & Market Scans



Visit where your customers shop:

- Farmers markets
- Grocery stores
- Online shops

Observe:

- Pricing
- Packaging
- Product variety
- Messaging

Ask:

- What problem are they solving?
- How do they justify price?

# Digital Tools for Market Insight

Look for:

- Seasonality
- Engagement patterns
- Content that drives action



Google Trends

Search interest over time



Social Media Insights

Facebook & Instagram  
analytics



Website Analytics

# Understanding Customer Segments

- “Everyone” is not your customer
- Segments are based on:
  - Motivation
  - Buying behavior
  - Values
- Common farm & food segments:
  - Health-focused buyers
  - Convenience shoppers
  - Local-first supporters
  - Price-sensitive customers



# Simple Customer Profile Exercise

Who:

- Buys most often?
- Spends the most?
- Refers others?

What do they value:

- Price
- Quality
- Convenience
- Story

Different segments = different messaging



# Turning Research into Action

## How to Use Research

- Adjust product mix
- Set pricing
- Choose markets

## Avoid Research Paralysis

### Analysis Paralysis

## Best Approach

- Test small
- Learn fast
- Adjust often



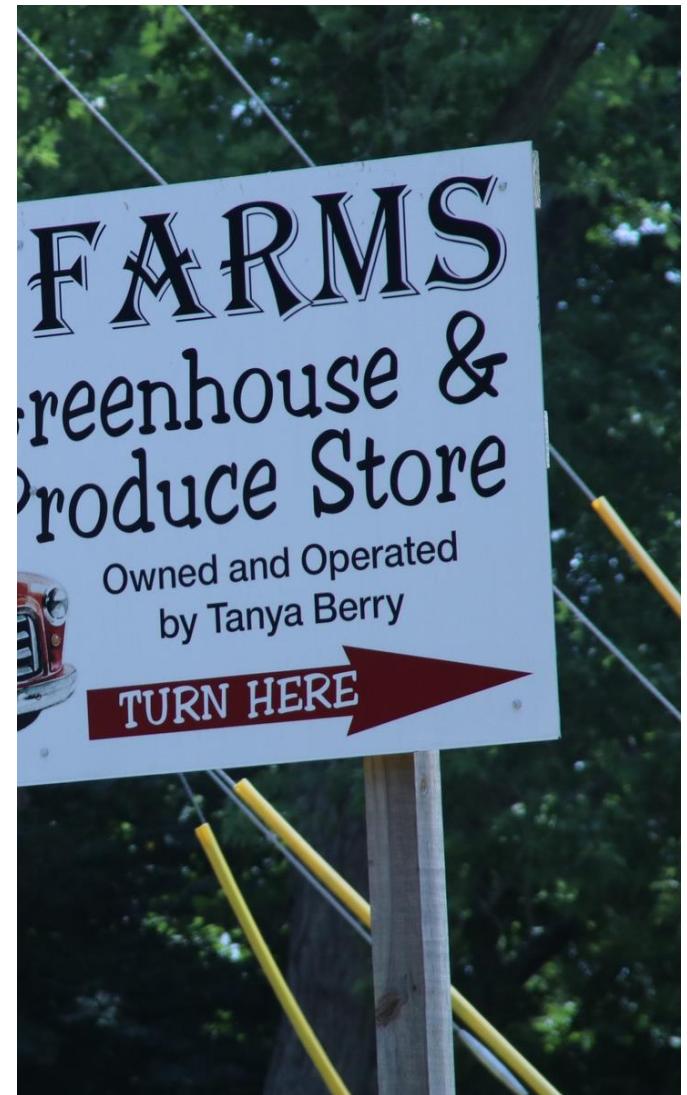
Pilot a new product  
at one market



Test pricing at one  
location



Add or remove  
products based on  
sales data



Update signage or  
messaging based on  
feedback

Question	Sub questions	Data Sources	Action
Should I continue in my current market or should I look for other markets?	<p>Are there similar products like yours already at other markets?</p> <p>What are prices at both markets</p> <p>Will you continue with your current market or abandon it?</p> <p>How reliable is each market for accepting your product?</p> <p>Will your customers travel to your new location?</p> <p>What are the costs associated with selling at that market?</p>	<p>Location scan, web search</p> <p>price reports, scan, inquiry</p> <p>Current sales data, volume</p> <p>Talk with other growers, buyers</p> <p>survey, customer interaction</p> <p>Time +Travel/mileage calculations, contact product buyer</p>	<p>Weigh the <b>costs</b> of changing or adding markets against the potential <b>additional revenue</b> either from higher prices and/or more volume sold.</p> <p>Make an informed decision about where to sell.</p>

Question	Sub questions	Data Sources	Action
What kind of content should I put on my social media?	<p>Who are your primary customers?</p> <p>Are they on social media? If not, how else can you reach them?</p> <p>What about your business or products most appeals to them?</p> <p>What has performed well in the past?</p>	<p>Observation + note taking during market window, website/facebook analytics, survey</p> <p>Interaction, “mention this ad for a free gift” promotion—count</p> <p>Interaction, Survey, analytics data, product packing experiments</p> <p>Analytics</p>	<p>Prioritize content and platforms that matters most to your customers and meet them where they are. This may mean changing course or simply slight tweaks</p> <p>Customer-focused market research will always be a work in progress and will need regular monitoring and revision.</p>

Question	Sub questions	Data Sources	Action
Should I add a new product?	<p>Are you good at producing this?</p> <p>What are your realistic costs to produce this?</p> <p>What is your potential selling price?</p> <p>What is your potential sales volume?</p> <p>Are there other competitor products in your desired market?</p> <p>Is there consumer demand?</p>	<p>Reflection, past field/product notes</p> <p>Enterprise budgets, records from similar products, estimates</p> <p>Price reports, scans, inquiries with buyers</p> <p>Request market attendance numbers, visit market, inquire with buyer</p> <p>Scan, web search</p> <p>Interaction, buyer conversations, surveys, broader consumer reports</p>	<p>If there appears to be an opening for your product, consumer demand, and the price you will get outweighs the cost of production and distribution, then you have a good shot.</p> <p>If any of these are shaky, proceed with caution, do some piloting or otherwise experiment.</p>

# Key Takeaways & Next Steps



- Market research is:
  - Ongoing
  - Practical
  - Built into daily operations

Try this next month:

1. Ask 5 customers better questions
2. Review one season of sales data
3. Observe one competitor  
intentionally



QUESTIONS

Questions?

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