

¹ Tap Root Farms 2 – Teaching Note

Conor Vibert developed this teaching note to guide the use of the multimedia case entitled Tap Root Farms 2 for instructional purposes. It is not the purpose of this material to serve as an illustration of how to effectively or ineffectively address a managerial situation.

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SUMMARY

Patricia Bishop, owner of Tap Root Farms deals with an important challenge in this multimedia case. Her company's innovative business model will only fly with a solid marketing initiative. Unclear to Patricia is what that initiative would look like. Advice is being sought as to how to proceed in resolving this real life issue. Students are offered access to a set of transcribed video clips that outline the issue and its cause along with providing context for the issue. In order to arrive at alternative solutions and justify their choice of a solution, students are expected to use sources of information not found in the case.

KEYWORDS

- Community Supported Agriculture, Marketing Channels

CASENET VIDEOS

Each video in this multimedia case features a segment of an interview with one of the organization's key decision makers. The videos describe:

1. the *Issue* facing the individual or organization
2. the *Cause* of the issue
3. *Background* information for the individual, organization and industry
4. *Alternatives* for addressing the issue
5. A suggested *Solution* and justification

Transcriptions for each video are also available. Students may not access the *Alternatives* and *Solution* videos or transcripts.

OBJECTIVES FOR TEACHING

There are a number of instructional objectives for this case.

- To enhance the decision making skills of students by having them address a real life issue faced by managers of Canadian or international companies.
- To provide students with a brief introduction to the small scale farming industry

¹ The Author wishes to thank Patricia Bishop for his/her support of this project. At Acadia University, thanks are in order for Dave Sheehan.

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- To offer students an opportunity to analyze a situation using concepts that illustrate the use of cooperative forms of organizations

POSSIBLE TEACHING STRATEGY

This case is ideal for in-class case analysis or as an assignment. Assuming an 80 minute class, here is an approximate class schedule:

| Time (minutes) | Task |
|----------------|---|
| 5 | Introduce case and divide students into groups. |
| 15 | Students view <i>Background</i> case videos and make notes. |
| 5 | Instructor plays the <i>Issue</i> and <i>Cause</i> clip(s). |
| 25 | Students identify alternatives, a solution and rationale. |
| 20 | Instructor guides a discussion around alternatives, solution and rationale. |
| 10 | Instructor plays the <i>Alternatives</i> and <i>Solution</i> clips. |

If the case is used as an assignment, the instructor may want to focus assessment on:

- 1) **Decision-making process.** The instructor would evaluate writing style, appropriateness of information sources, alternatives, solution and rationale. This approach recognizes that the alternatives and solutions offered in the case are not necessarily optimal, and other choices may be equally effective. Students can be rewarded for their selection of decision making approaches, analytical frameworks and cited reference material.
- 2) **Outcomes.** The instructor would evaluate how closely student responses match those offered in the *Alternatives* and *Solution* video clips. Or, the instructor could use the insight of an existing research paper or analytical framework as the basis for judging outcomes.
- 3) **A combination of process and outcome.** The instructor may apportion the grade between process and outcomes.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Students can be asked to identify a set of alternatives to address the issue outlined in the case, a solution and rationale. Other questions that will help students prepare for their case analysis include:

- What marketing channels does a small rural organization like Tap Root Farms have available to it?
- Who is the target market for the marketing efforts?

CASE ANALYSIS

Issue: The *Issue* and *Cause* video clips outline the problem or challenge of the case.

- Hi I am Patricia Bishop from Tap Root Farms. The issue that we had to deal with was once we decided to do community shared agriculture (CSA), we need to figure out how to market our CSA, or how we were going to get customers. We did not know which route was going to be the best one. It was really important for us to be able to be doing

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marketing in different ways because the only way people were going to be able to buy our vegetables through our community shared agriculture program was if they knew about it and if we were able to invite them to participate in ways that were meaningful for them. It was really important for us to connect with communities of people.

Analysis:

To start their analysis of the case, students should view the *Background* video clips. These clips should help students grasp the following points or case facts.

- Patricia Bishop and her husband own and manage the farm
- Tap Root Farms is a Certified Organic Farm
- Tap Root Farms competes based on relationships and experience
- Small farms is described as the industry within which Tap Root competes.
- Its business model is one where people who eat food connect directly with us as farmers who grow food in a relationship around food to insure they get food that comes from our farm into their homes.

Researching information sources other than the content of the cases should enable students to garner the following insights:

- The combined farm gate value of agricultural products produced on Nova Scotia's farms in 2002 was \$420 million.
- Nova Scotia has 3900 census farms producing food and fibre on 400 thousand acres of improved agricultural land and directly employs over 9000 people
- Farmers have a total capital investment of \$1.6 billion in Nova Scotia's rural economy,
- The agricultural sector produces annually 36,000 beef cattle; 226,000 hogs; 72 million pounds of chicken; 18 million dozen eggs; 173,000 kiloliters of milk; 2 million bushels of apples; 40 million pounds of wild blueberries; and, 200 million pounds of fresh vegetables.
- Nova Scotia is a world leader in research and the production of carrots, wild blueberries, strawberry plants and fur.

With this information in hand students can be challenged to identify an analytic framework that will help them organize their thoughts.

- PUT ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK HERE

Effort focused on research coupled with analysis should enable students to present a series of options. These can be compared to the options offered by the interviewee which are also summarized below and found in the Alternatives video clip.

- So our alternatives were to use paid advertising. Putting an ad in the Chronicle Herald. Getting an ad in The Coast or any other publication in our community like Saltscapes. One other option was to do media through press releases. Writing our own press release.

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A third option that we thought we had was through social media. The fourth one was through personal networking and developing communities of people that we knew.

The *Solutions* video clip offers the interviewees' solution to the issue along with a rationale. Highlighted below, this can be compared to the student response and explanation.

- We chose to do a couple of the options. We did immediately set up our social marketing campaign with Facebook, our Twitter accounts, and e-mail and newsletters. But I spent a great deal of time and energy with physical networking such as going to organizations and giving presentations about local food and local agriculture and the model we were proposing to use on our farm. With every opportunity we had to go and speak with people to build a community of people around that idea. I did not use the print advertising which is the more traditional way that costs money because I did not think it would help us in the first couple of years grow that connection which is what our firm was about. I did do a little bit of the press release work and use the local media to build community but not as often as we certainly could have.

SUGGESTED COURSES

We suggest that this case would be suitable for a number of courses. These courses include:

- Entrepreneurship
- Community Development
- Marketing

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

The case offers students opportunities to undertake interesting additional research.

Students may want to delve deeper into how managers make decisions. Classic approaches to decision making include works by Cyert and March (1963) and Tversky and Kahnemann (1974).

Students interested in learning more about the industry in general might make use of numerous online information sources some of which are noted below.

- Atlantic Certified Organic <http://www.atlanticcertifiedorganic.ca/html/about.html>. Information about becoming an organically certified farm
- ATTRA- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service. <https://attra.ncat.org/>. Online information source for sustainable, community and organic agriculture
- Coop Zone. Available: http://coopzone.coop/en/coop_types. Types of Co-operatives.
- FarmStart: <http://www.farmstart.ca/>. Online resources for individuals seeking to start a new farm.
- Local Harvest <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>. Online information about community supported agriculture
- Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture: <http://nsfa-fane.ca/member-services/corporate-membership-info/quick-facts/>. Quick Facts about Agriculture in Nova Scotia

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- Small Farm Canada <http://smallfarmcanada.ca> Subscription magazine targeting small farm owners in Canada.

REFERENCES

A number of articles, referenced below, offer insight that might help instructors effectively explore this case with students.

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