

Johnson Speaks at FAPC Marketing Workshop

STILLWATER, Okla.—A food service distributor was one of nine presenters during the Food & Agricultural Products Center's second annual "Real World" Marketing Workshop held recently.

Bob Johnson, director of merchandising for Sysco Food Services of Oklahoma spoke to approximately 40 participants regarding food service distributing during the workshop.

Johnson began a career with the Sysco Corporation in 1993. He has worked in St. Louis, Houston and Oklahoma, and his responsibilities have included sales management, marketing and merchandising.

During his presentation, Johnson discussed the importance of distribution centers, such as Sysco, in the food industry.

"Our mission is the continuous improvement of our system and services, and the professional development of our employees, to assist our customers in their success," Johnson said.

His presentation focused on distribution practices, and he used examples based upon his personal experience to illustrate the importance of finding a quality company to aid in the distribution of a new product.

"If my company can make money selling your product, we will be interested in it," Johnson said. "If your product fits a need and is unique, it is probably marketable."

Johnson said Sysco decides what products to carry by the market demand for the product and whether there is something unique about the specific product. He also emphasized the importance of strong packaging because of the many moves the product will make in the warehouse before its final destination, the restaurant.

According to Johnson a businesses' representation matters and a new product needs a good broker before most large distribution centers will deal with it. He also stressed the importance of providing a quality product to the restaurants.

"If the restaurants don't succeed, you and I fail," he said. "I am nothing more than a box mover, but you will find that distribution is a major step in getting your product to the consumer."

The purpose for the marketing workshop was to help participants address marketing issues such as market identification, market research and market planning, said Jim Brooks, FAPC business planning and marketing specialist and chair of the workshop.

"The fact is a good marketing program is essential to survive and succeed in the highly

competitive food-marketing arena," Brooks said. "Marketing is not just radio, television and other advertising. It's not just knocking on doors of prospective buyers and attending trade shows. It's critical for success."

Other speakers during the workshop included Mark Harsha, Harsha & Associates; Steve Long, Food Marketing Specialists; Del Van Horn, Advance Food Company; Vince Orza, Eateries, Inc.; Randy Earhart, Taco Mayo; David Books; Shawnee Milling Co.; Gerald Cockerham, Associated Wholesale Grocers; and Lee Ann Potter, Oklahoma Restaurant Association.

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