

*Landowners and the Community*

## Marketing the Hunting Experience

*Jack Thigpen and Don Steinbach\**

### Marketing Your Lease

Marketing matches the resources of an operation with the needs of the clientele. Many hunting lease operators are farmers. While most are good managers of livestock, crop production and natural resources, few have had the need to learn the marketing aspects of a recreational enterprise.

Fee-access recreational activities like hunting leasing are different from farming in at least two major ways. First, the product is "nonstandard." In traditional agriculture, products are usually "standardized." Corn, soybeans, cattle and hogs have quality standards that to a large degree determine the prices that farmers receive in the open market. In hunting lease operations, different game species exist for hunting and different services can be offered as part of the leasing package. Secondly, the leasing operator is dealing directly with the public. Unlike the farmer, who rarely comes face-to-face with the grocery store consumer, the hunting lease operator deals with his or her customers

personally, often on a continuing basis. These two points make understanding your resources and your clientele a necessity for a successful operation.

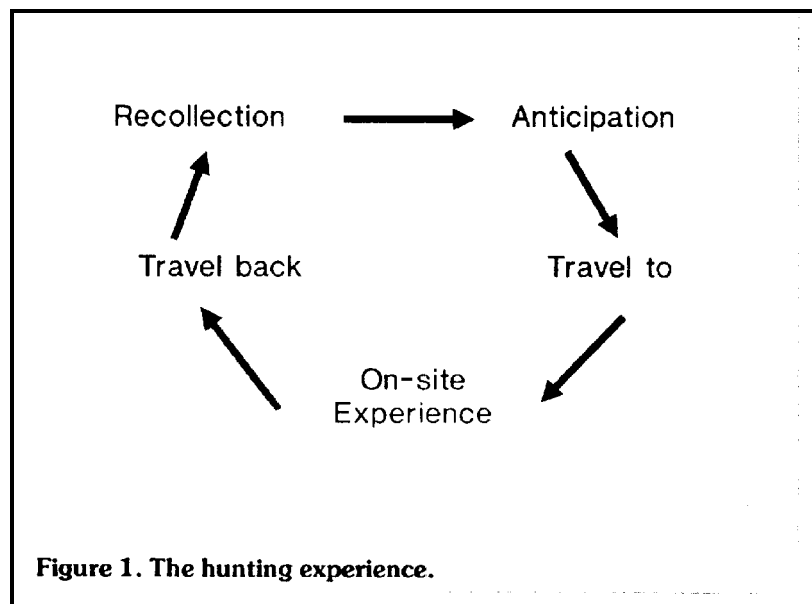
### Understanding Your Resources

Understanding your resources as a hunting lease operator is a necessity for a solid marketing plan. Most farmers know how much acreage they have in pastureland and woodland, a rough idea of the game animals that reside or pass through their land and how much money they owe the bank. However, many other factors are involved with running a successful hunting lease. McClelland (1989)

suggested a worksheet that can help you determine the strengths and weaknesses of your operation. The worksheet at the end of the paper may help you rate a recreation enterprise.

### Hunting as a Recreational Experience

Several thoughts and activities make up the hunting experience. Figure 1 displays a way of looking at the hunting experience over time. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) proposed that the on-site portion of recreation (in this case the time spent on the hunt) is just one of at least five major



**Figure 1. The hunting experience.**

Jack Thigpen, Economic Development Specialist, and Don Steinbach, Program Leader for Wildlife and Fisheries, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

phases of an outdoor recreational experience. It is obvious from this figure that the time the client is on your property does not stand alone, but is one part of the cycle that is the entire experience. The operator can use all parts of this cycle to market the hunting experience.

### **Anticipation**

The hunting trip begins by anticipation, which includes the planning of the trip. This phase may extend over weeks or even months and can be a source of enjoyment in itself. In anticipation of a hunting trip the selection of hunting equipment, sighting-in of guns, working-up the ideal load and making the travel plans is usually a pleasurable affair.

### **Travel To**

The second major phase of an outdoor recreational experience is travel to the actual site. The time required for travel, the costs of the travel and the satisfaction of the travel will vary among individuals. There will also be differences in the route of travel and the destination. Some people enjoy the travel in itself and look at the trip as an opportunity to see new places. Others may view the trip to a hunting site

as a necessary nuisance and attempt to minimize the amount of time "wasted on the road."

### **On-site**

The time actually spent on the hunting site is the third major phase of the hunting experience. This time is usually thought of as the whole experience, but in actuality it may comprise less than one-half of the total time or expense of the trip. It may be the centerpiece and the remainder of the outdoor recreation experience built around it, but it is only a part of the entire package.

### **Travel Back**

Going home or the travel back is the fourth major phase of the hunting trip. This trip is typically very different from the trip on the way to the hunt. The travel route may be identical, but the attitude and mood of the hunters has changed. Anticipation and excitement are usually replaced by pleasant memories of the hunt at best, and dreadful anticipation of job responsibilities at worst.

### **Recollection**

After the hunt is over, the fifth major phase of the experience begins - the recollection of the trip. After a trip the hunter will recall to memory points of the experience that stand out in his or her mind. These memories will be shared with friends, relatives and coworkers — "sometimes beyond the point of maximum interest" (Clawson and Knetsch, 1966:35).

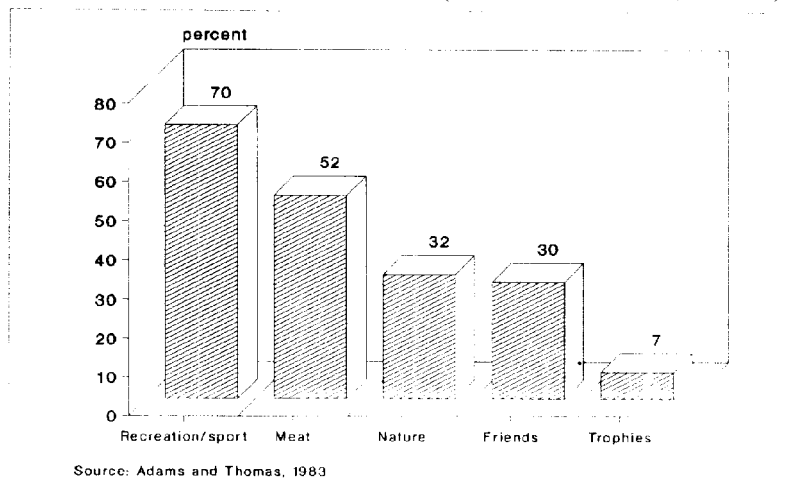
If the trip has made a major impression (good or bad) the recollection will be strong and lasting. This entire sequence of major phases is somewhat cyclical. The recollection phase serves as starting point for the anticipation of the next outdoor recreational experience.

Hunting is much more than a quest for a trophy animal. Figure 2 (Adams and Thomas, 1983) illustrates this point as Texas hunters responded that recreation and sport was their prime consideration for hunting (70 percent). Hunting for meat or food was the second highest reason given for hunting (62 percent). The opportunity to be close to nature and being with friends (32 and 30 percent, respectively) were both fairly important reasons for hunting. Finally, only 7 percent of all respondents reported that trophies were their most important reason for hunting. Survey research of hunters in Colorado (Guynn, 1979) similarly indicate that the process of the entire hunting experience is more important than the end product.

## **Marketing Tools**

### **Survey research**

Large-scale survey research for marketing purposes is expensive and usually not affordable to individual operators. Public institutions such as land-grant universities are capable of such efforts, and organized requests for this type of project may be an alternative. This type of research can generate infor-



**Figure 2. Recreation is the top reason for hunting.**

mation for segmenting the market into distinct groups of people who might require different recreational experiences.

Market segments are typically comprised of clientele characteristics that may be related to the individuals' tastes, preferences and ability to pay for them (Kotler, 1983). For example, hunters could be classified by geographic location (state and region), demographic characteristics (age, gender, family size, education, occupation, income) and behavioristic attributes (multi-species hunter, trophy hunter, meat hunter, appreciative user).

### Marketing Your Own

Marketing is a process. It is a continuous, year-round job involving your own research with current clients. This type of research is a continuing process of reevaluation. In Figure 1, the different parts of the recreational experience were outlined. It is obvious from this figure that the time when the client is on your property does not stand alone, but is one part of the cycle of the entire experience. However, the operator can use all parts of this cycle to market the hunting experience.

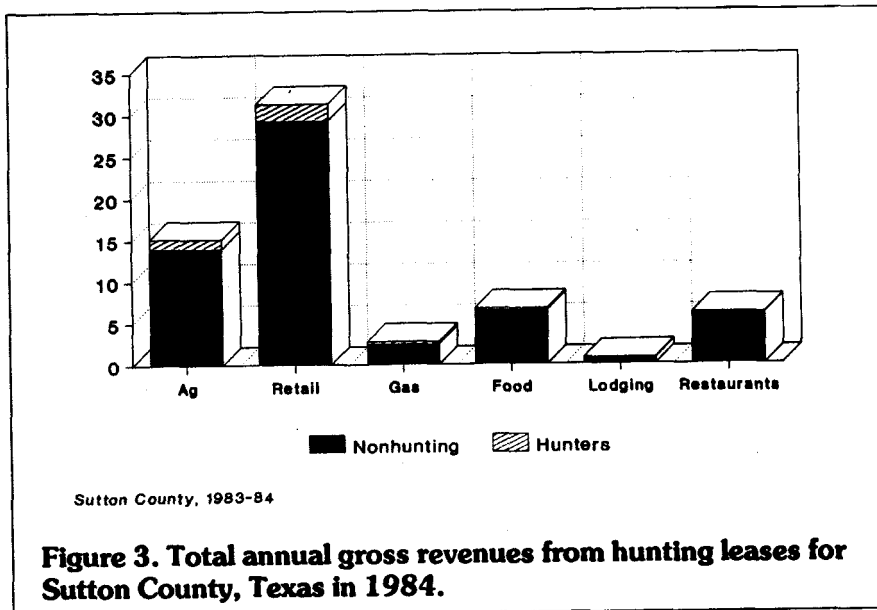
### Anticipation

The operator telephones to report on hunting and weather conditions and to give directions if needed. A few minutes of conversation can raise the level of enthusiasm. This is an opportunity to clarify details and field questions.

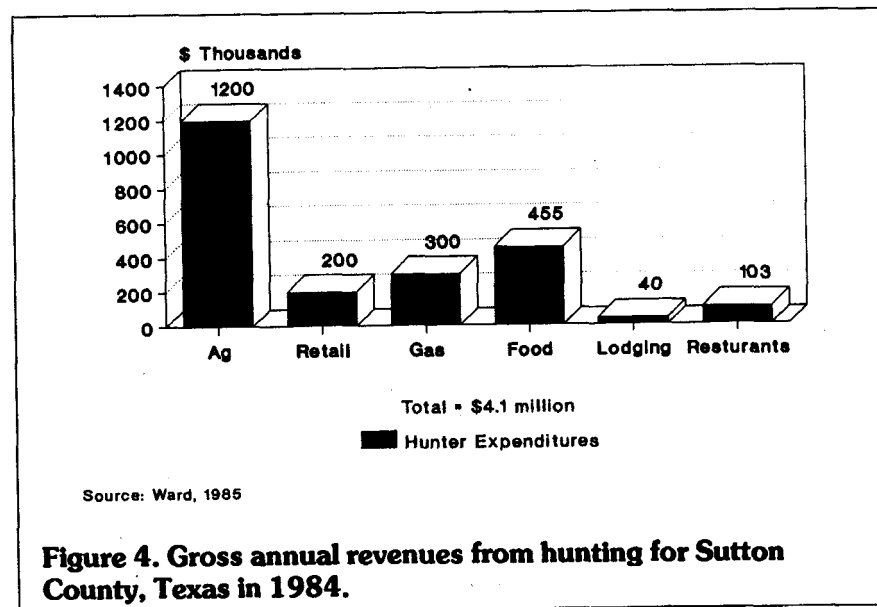
### Travel to

Operators who are working with their community can have a real advantage during this phase of the experience. Community hospitality can be initiated by individual businesses and residents or can be a

part of an organized effort to train employees to be more hospitable (Watt, 1989). Special events are a



**Figure 3. Total annual gross revenues from hunting leases for Sutton County, Texas in 1984.**

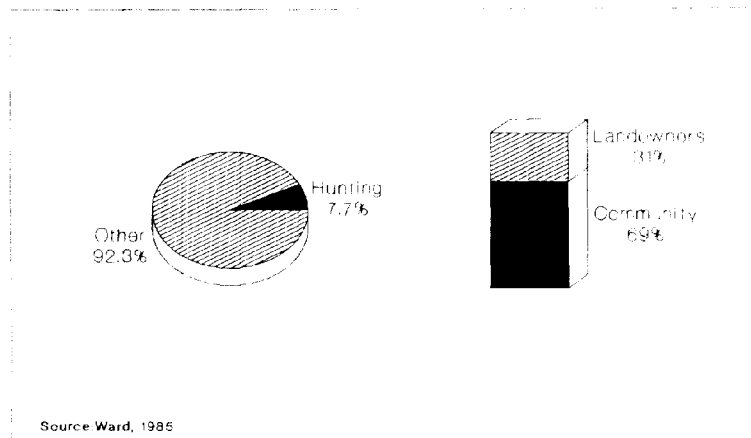


**Figure 4. Gross annual revenues from hunting for Sutton County, Texas in 1984.**

way that communities can promote the hunting experience and benefit economically as well. These events can be economically important to the community and provide an added dimension to the hunting experience for the hunter.

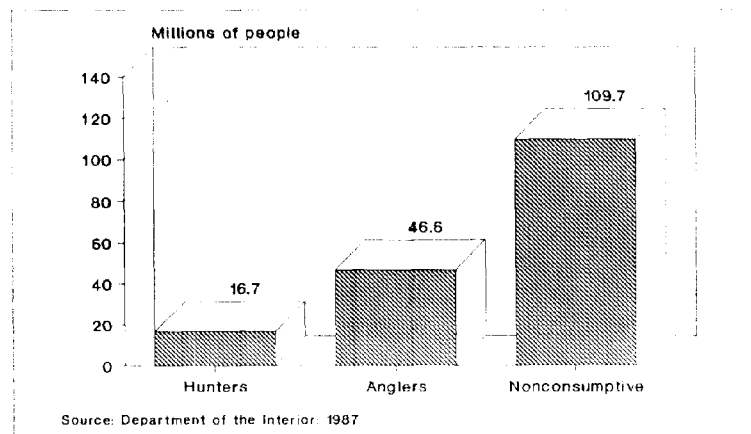
The relationship between landowners and rural communities in areas of high leasing activity can be a symbiotic one. Although little research has been done to understand this relationship, one Texas study (Ward, 1985) indicates a positive economic situation for both groups.

Figure 3 shows the total gross county revenues for Sutton County, Texas in 1984. The estimated gross income from hunting in the county contributed 8 percent of the total agricultural income in the county (in the form of direct payments to agricultural operators for hunting leases). Dollars spent by hunters amounted to 6 percent of all retail



Source: Ward, 1985

**Figure 5. Percentage of landowner and community revenues from hunting for Sutton County in 1984.**



Source: Department of the Interior, 1987

**Figure 6. U.S. hunters, anglers and nonconsumptive wildlife recreationists in 1985.**

sales, 11 percent of gasoline sales, 7 percent of grocery store sales, 5 percent of lodging receipts and 2 percent of restaurants' total revenues. Although these percentages may seem low, in absolute dollar terms the revenue generated is considerable.

Figure 4 displays the total gross revenues from hunting in 1984 for Sutton County. Farmers and ranchers received over \$1.2 million, retail sales were over \$2 million, gasoline approximately \$300,000 and food sales totaled over \$450,000. Hunter expenditures contributed over \$40,000 to lodging receipts and \$100,000 to county restaurants.

Nearly 8 percent of total gross revenues (over \$5.2 million) was attributed to hunting. Figure 5 reveals that close to 31 percent (\$1.2 million) went to agricultural operators. The remaining 69 percent (over \$4 million) was spent on goods and services in the rest of the county. This means that for every dollar spent on hunting leases in Sutton County in 1984, two dollars were spent somewhere else in the county. This impact could be decisive for many employers in rural areas.

**On-site**

This is the culmination of the year's planning and anticipation. Operators and communities have the opportunity to provide an experience that the hunter will want to repeat. This is the best time to find out information from your clientele, and the best way to find out what is on their minds is to ask them.

It is important to remember at this point that you are managing a hunting experience for your clientele, not just selling a product. Managing your hunters requires a combination of education and promotion (Welge, 1984). Using education and promotion, you can market to the hunter what you need, as well as what he or she wants.

Take the example of attempting to improve the sex ratio of your deer herd by harvesting more does. This can be accomplished by educational tactics (teach your hunters about the importance of game management and the exceptional flavor of doe meat) and promotional programs (offering prizes or rewards for the biggest doe and/or a pricing structure that encourages the harvesting of does). Welge (1984:463) describes his Hill Country Texas operation's method of pricing to encourage doe harvest:

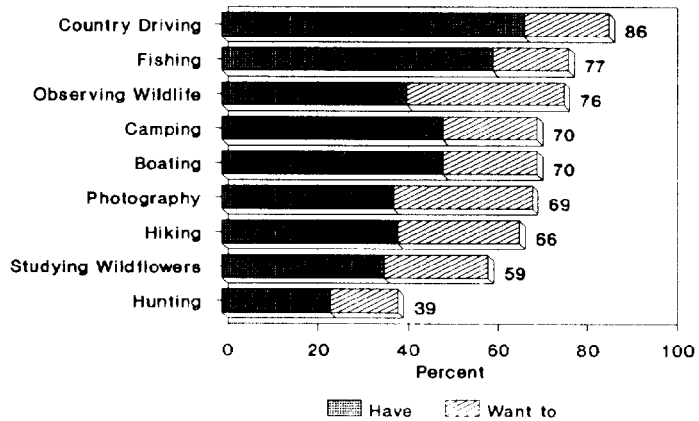
"The base price for the 2½ day hunt is \$300 per person base hunt price, there is a kill fee of \$250 for a forked-horn buck which means a buck with three points or more. We limit him (or her) to one of those. \$125 is charged for each spike and \$100 for each doe. If a person kills three does, we subtract \$50 from the total bill."

While the hunter is on-site it is also very important to remember that there are activities other than hunting that can make the experience more complete and enjoyable. Fee access recreation is not limited to hunting activities. Indeed, the potential demand in the future will probably come from non-hunting uses of wildlife on private lands. Figure 6 shows the results of the 1985 national survey by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Approximately 16.7 million people over the age of 16 years, or about 1 in 10 of adult Americans, hunted. Over 2½ times that number (46.6 million) participated in fishing, or roughly 1 of every 4 adult Americans. However, the largest category includes those 109.7 million people classified as "nonconsumptive" users of wildlife recreation (Department of the Interior, 1987).

The survey suggests that a substantial increase in the number of anglers between 1980 and 1985, a slight decline in the number of hunters and an increase in participation in other wildlife-associated activities (Payne, 1988). Implication for the Southern Region is that as the population becomes more urbanized, the demand for nonconsumptive wildlife activities will continue to grow and interested landowners and rural communities need to consider the market potential for such activities.

Nonconsumptive wildlife activities have been most successful when used with other outdoor recreation such as canoeing, horseback riding and camping (Swendsen, 1985).

What do we mean by "nonconsumptive" or "appreciative" uses of wildlife? In a recent study of Texas residents (Clark and Adams, 1989) it was found that respondents enjoy a wide range of wildlife activities. Figure 7 illustrates the real demand for some of the nonconsumptive activities as well as hunting. Real demand is defined



Source: Thomas and Adams: 1989

**Figure 7. Real demand for selected wildlife activities in Texas.**

as the sum of actual demand (current participation) and latent demand (a desire to participate). This figure also shows that there is a real demand of between 59 and 86 percent of the Texas population for the nonconsumptive activities listed. The real demand for hunting was 39 percent, the lowest of all categories. In Texas over 36 million acres were leased for hunting in 1988-89, resulting in an estimated gross income to landowners of between \$100 and \$300 million (Thigpen, 1989). If the greater real demand for the other activities is any indication, a strong potential exists in these areas.

### **Travel back**

A pleasant hunting experience can make this often unpleasant trip a time for reflection on the satisfaction of time well spent and the beginning of anticipation of next year's return.

### **Recollection**

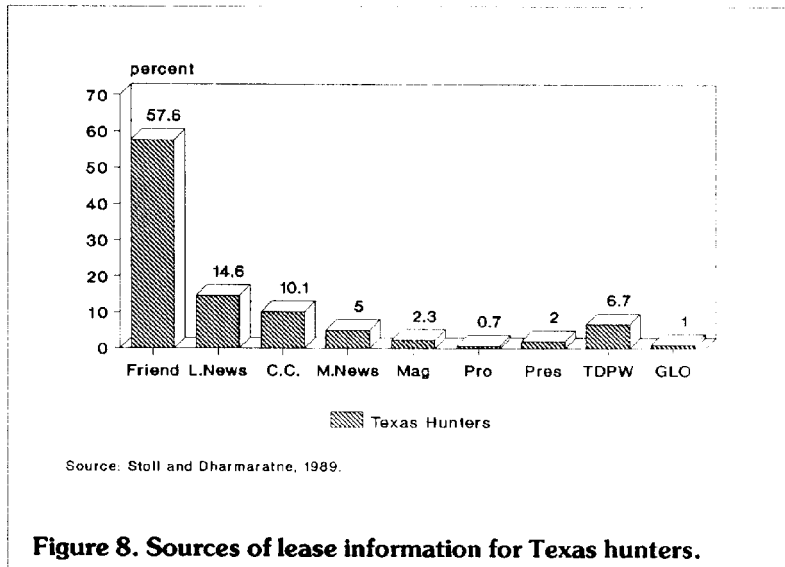
This is the time for the operator to communicate by phone and letters about hunts of the past season, to keep clients informed throughout the year of environmental and game conditions, about improvements to the operation underway and to keep interest "smoldering."

### **Advertising**

Advertising is doing anything that gives anyone an impression of your operation. The ideal situation is to give potential clients a favorable impression. However, don't attempt to sell something you can't provide. Nothing travels faster than bad news. In the retail industry it is accepted that as a rule of thumb one dissatisfied customer will tell ten people about his or her unpleasant experience. It is important to give an honest portrayal of what the potential client can expect.

Numerous sources of advertising are available. A partial listing (McClelland, et al., 1989) would include:

- newspapers
- newsletters
- magazines
- television
- brochures
- trade journals
- sports shows



**Figure 8. Sources of lease information for Texas hunters.**

- direct mail
- local referral
- billboards
- booking agents
- telephone
- sport articles
- local sporting goods shows
- radio
- local hunting or shooting clubs
- videotapes
- word-of-mouth
- hunter to hunter
- travel agents

Many methods of advertising exist, but they are not all equal in effectiveness. In general, Texas survey results indicate that the more personal the contact and the more that the local community is involved, the more successful the advertising method. There is a great deal of variation between different types of leases and which advertising method is appropriate for each. For example, you would not expect to advertise day hunting for grey squirrels in the Wall Street Journal.

Although regional differences may exist, the results of recent survey work (Stoll and Dharmaratne, 1989) to determine the sources of hunting leasing information for Texas hunters may be useful. Figure 8 presents graphically some of the results from the survey. The

great majority (57.6 percent) of Texas hunters learned about their hunting lease in word-of-mouth contact from friends and neighbors.

Nearly 15 percent received information from local newspapers and over 10 percent from local Chambers of Commerce.

Importance of local support in advertising (nearly 25 percent) reemphasizes the importance of operator/community cooperation. Five percent got their information from major metropolitan newspapers and 2.3 percent relied upon trade magazines such as *Outdoor Life*, *National Rifleman*, etc. Less than 1 percent of hunters utilized professional publications such as medical journals and law publications. Two percent learned of their leases through presentations in clubs, groups and their companies. A total of 7.7 percent (6.7 and 1 percent respectively) used public locator services offered by the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife and the General Land Office of Texas.

In summarizing the success of advertising methods, word-of-mouth through friends and neighbors is "the dog that hunts" in Texas. This has an additional benefit of allowing some screening

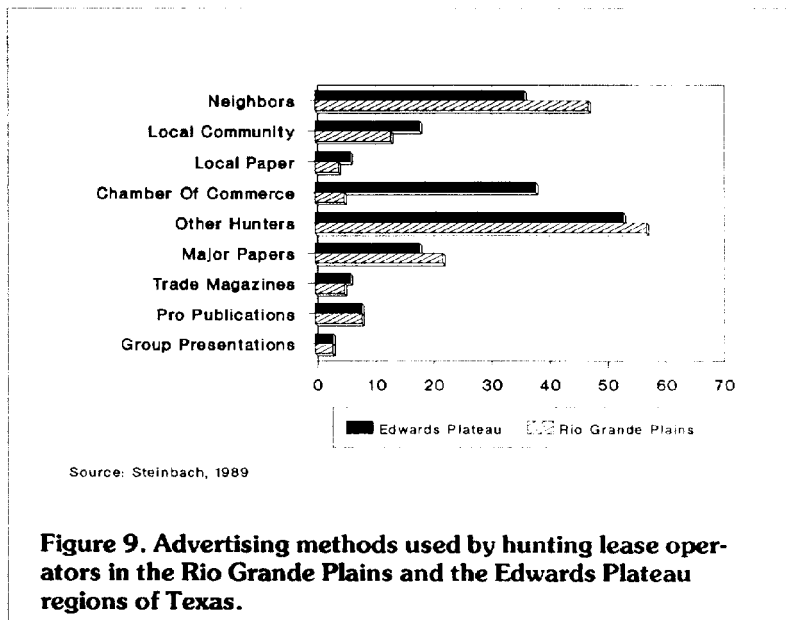
of potential clientele by personal contact of references.

Another Texas study (Steinbach, 1988) examined the methods used by lessors to obtain what they felt to be "good" lessees. The results support the notion that there is variation by region in advertising methods. Figure 9 shows some of the results of this research. In both the Edwards Plateau and the Rio Grande Plains Regions of Texas, neighbors and other hunters were high on the list of successful advertising methods. One interesting difference between the two regions is apparent when the importance of the local Chamber of Commerce as a source of "good hunters" is examined. Marketing through the Chambers of Commerce was used by 38 percent of Edwards Plateau lessors, but only 5 percent of Rio Grande Plains ranchers (Steinbach, 1988:20).

### Summary and Conclusions

In summary there are four major points to be gleaned from the paper. First is the idea of leasing for hunting as a total recreational experience. This hunting experience is comprised of anticipation, travel to, on-site, travel back and recollection components. Lessors need to manage all aspects of this experience.

Secondly, hunting leasing can economically benefit not only landowners but rural communities as well. Efforts should be made to combine forces with local Chambers of Commerce and other community groups to foster an environment that will welcome hunters.



Thirdly, the future markets for the leasing of private lands may include the nonhunting, appreciative types of wildlife recreation. This should be a part of marketing strategies.

Finally, research results indicate that, in general, personal contact and local community references have been most effective in securing "good hunters." However, with careful screening other advertising techniques can be rewarding as well.

## References

Adams, Clark E. and John K. Thomas. "Characteristics and Opinions of Texas Hunters." In the Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. No. 37:244-251. (1983).

Clawson, Marion and Jack L. **Knetsch. Economics of Outdoor Recreation.** Published for Resources for the Future by The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, MD. (1966).

Guynn, Dwight E. *Management of Deer Hunters on Private Land in Colorado.* Ph.D. Thesis.

Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO. (1979).

Kotler, Phillip. **Principles of Marketing.** Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. (1983).

McClelland, S. D., D. A. Cleaves, T. E. Bedell and W. A. Mukatis. *Managing a Fee-Recreation Enterprise on Private Lands.* Oregon State University Extension Service Circular 1277 (March 1989).

Payne, Jack. "Wildlife Enterprise Opportunities on a Limited Land Base." In Proceedings of the First International Wildlife Ranching Symposium, Raul Valdez, editor. May, 1988.

Steinbach, Donny Wayne. *Economics and Operational Characteristics of Recreational Leasing in the Edwards Plateau and Rio Grande Plains of Texas.* Unpublished Ph.D., Texas A&M University. (1988)

Stoll, John R. and Gerard Dhar-maratne. Private Sector Transactions in the Market for Recreational Hunting Opportunities. Unpublished Manuscript. Department of

Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University. (1989).

Thigpen, Jack. *Understanding Your Local Economy: Distribution of Shooting Preserve Acreage.* Publication L-2338. Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University. (1989).

Thomas, John K. and Clark E. Adams. *The Public and Texas Wildlife.* Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Texas A&M University. (1989).

U.S. Department of Interior. News Release. (March 21, 1987).

Ward, Albert. "Hunting Lease Impacts on Rural Communities' Economics." In Proceedings of the 1985 International Ranchers Roundup, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University.

Watt, Carson E. *Texas Hospitality: a Training Program for the Tourism Industry.* Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Department of Recreation and Parks, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843. (1989).

Welge, Henry Louis. "Overcoming Problems in Managing Hunters." In Proceedings of International Ranchers Roundup. L.D. White and D.E. Guynn, editors. Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. (1984).

## Rating Your Recreation Enterprise

Quality of experience	High	Medium	Low	Doesn't apply
<b>Hunting</b>				
Size of operation				
Animal population numbers				
Size of animals				
Hunter success rate				
Time required for success				
Numbers of hunters/groups accommodated at one time				
Other hunting, fishing or sport recreation-related activities				
<b>Other recreation</b>				
Presence of other activities for nonhunters - spouse, children				
Other recreation-based activities - bird-watching, rock hounding, etc.				
Scenery and aesthetics				
Surrounding tourist attractions				
Entertainment				
Wilderness opportunities				
<b>Services offered</b>				
<i>Hunting-related</i>				
Guides				
Vehicles				
Horses				
Packing out				
Butchering, wrapping, shipping				
Guaranteed kill				
Guaranteed trophy				
Tournaments and prizes				
Taxidermy				
<i>Clientele-related</i>				
Distance to clientele center				
Transportation dependability				
Air				
Surface				
Size of potential clientele group in relation to its distance from your operation				
Distance from your competition				
Number of clients accommodated annually				
Estimated cost of clients' trip to your base of operation				
<i>Other</i>				
Lodging				
Camping				
Recreation vehicle facilities				
Food				
Beverage				

Source: McClelland, et. al. 1989.

*Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin.*

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Zerle L. Carpenter, Director, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.