



# Customer Relations Practicum

## 2024 Michigan FFA Ag. Sales Contest



C1

### Background Information:

You are an employee at Smith Garden Supply in Grand Rapids, MI. You sell vegetable seeds and plants to home gardeners including tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers.

Yesterday, Sam Jackson purchased 10 tomato plants. Upon getting home, Sam realized that she had never raised tomatoes. In fact, she had a complete “Lack of understanding” in how to raise tomato plants. She is in the next room and needs your help to be successful to get her new plants started. From your training as a Smith Garden Supply employee, you know the following about starting tomatoes:

### Time Your Tomato Planting

Plant tomatoes in spring or early summer. Exact timing will depend on the temperatures in your geographic region. Plant tomato plants once the soil has warmed — when daytime temperatures reach above 60 degrees Fahrenheit and nighttime temperatures stay above 50 F. Temperatures below 50 F will result in stunted plants and little or no fruit.

### Choose a Tomato Growing Area

Tomatoes require full sun — that means a minimum of eight hours of direct sunlight a day. So choose an exposed growing area, away from buildings, trees and tall shrubs. Exposure also ensures that the plants receive adequate ventilation, which helps prevent common garden diseases.

### Prepare Your Tomato Planting Site

Tomatoes grow best in well-draining soil that's high in organic matter, with slightly acidic pH between 6.5 to 7.0.1 Prior to planting, increase the organic matter by applying a 2- to 3-inch layer of compost to the soil surface and tilling it into the soil.

### Plant and Support Your Tomatoes

Just before planting, remove the lower leaves from the plant by pinching them off at the stem. When you do this, small bumps called "root nodes" remain on the tomato stem. Dig a hole and set the tomato plant inside, deeper than it was in its original nursery container, so the root nodes are buried. Roots will form along the stem at the root nodes, creating a strong root system and a vigorous plant. Space tomato plants 24 to 30 inches apart. After planting, pat the soil around the plant until firm. To preserve the health of tomato plants and make harvesting easy, cage them when planting. Wire cages support plants during growth and keep leaves and fruit off the ground, resulting in higher yields, fewer pests and less chance of disease.

**Assignment:** You have 5 minutes to prepare and then 6-8 minutes to resolve this situation.

**Process:** At the end of your 5-minute preparation time, the contest volunteer will take you from your preparation area to your “customer” (the judge). The judge will play the part of the “customer”.

Please make sure that you adhere to store policy while being creative in solving your customer’s concerns.

***STUDENTS: Return this sheet  
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# Smith Garden Supply - Starting Tomatoes Successfully

(Student can take this slip with them to the judging room)

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C1



## Customer Relations Practicum

### 2024 Michigan FFA Ag. Sales Contest



C2

#### **Background Information:**

You are an employee at Smith Garden Supply in Grand Rapids, MI. You sell vegetable seeds and plants to home gardeners including tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers.

Last month, Sam Jackson purchased 10 tomato plants. Upon getting home, Sam planted them, but now realizes she has a “Lack of understanding” in how to raise tomato plants. She is in the next room and now needs your help to be successful with her new plants. From your training as a Smith Garden Supply employee, you know the following about raising tomatoes:

#### **Water and Weed Tomatoes Regularly**

Water your plants well after planting, and then water again when the soil surface dries. Once the plant becomes established and you see new growth, water so the soil remains evenly moist, but never soggy. Overly wet soil can lead to fungus root rot and result in watery fruit. Soil that's too dry can result in fruit cracking and blossom end rot. Avoid overhead watering with tomatoes — wet foliage can help spread some fungal diseases. Weed often, as weeds will steal water and nutrients from the tomato plants. To prevent weed growth and maintain an even soil temperature, mulch the soil surrounding the tomato plant with a 2- to 3-inch layer of shredded bark.

#### **Watch for Tomato Pests and Diseases**

Tomato plants fall victim to several pests and diseases, some of which can cause serious damage and reduce fruit production. Your best line of defense is to check your plants for signs of trouble every time you water, and then react quickly.

Pests that commonly affect tomato plants include tomato hornworms — large, green worms with white and black markings. Tomato hornworms can reach 4 inches in length at maturity. They eat tomato leaves and can quickly defoliate a plant. Other troublemakers include the tomato fruitworm, which is the larva of a moth that eats the insides of the tomato. Flea beetles are also a problem, as they jump from plant to plant feeding on foliage. “Sevin” brand insecticide kills these pests on contact. Allow at least five days between treating your tomato plants and harvesting their fruits. Hornworms can also be removed by hand and destroyed. Common diseases that strike tomato plants include early blight, gray mold, fusarium wilt, gray leaf spot, powdery mildew and anthracnose. The fungal infections that cause these diseases wilt foliage and leave spots and other markings on foliage. To stop and control these diseases and prevent their spread, turn to Daconil Fungicide.

#### **Harvest Your Tomatoes Often**

Enjoy the fruits of your labor as soon as tomatoes ripen, and harvest regularly to promote fruit production. Harvest using garden pruners or by twisting the fruit until it comes free from the vine. Avoid pulling on fruit when picking, as this can break the tender tomato branches.

**Assignment:**

You have 5 minutes to prepare and then 6-8 minutes to resolve this situation.

**Process:** At the end of your 5-minute preparation time, the contest volunteer will take you from your preparation area to your “customer” (the judge). The judge will play the part of the “customer”.

Please make sure that you adhere to store policy while being creative in solving your customer’s concerns.

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# Smith Garden Supply – Growing Tomatoes Successfully

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## **Water and Weed Tomatoes Regularly**

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## Pre-Call Planning Team Practicum 2024 Michigan FFA Ag Sales Contest Contestant's Copy



Your Sales Team is preparing to sell to a potential customer. This is known as pre-call plan. Your customer is Family Farm & Home, a retail store with locations across Michigan and the mid-west. They sell general agricultural merchandise to farmers and rural residents. Your contact at the Michigan Family Farm & Home headquarters is Mr. Mike Foster. He is a former 4-H member from Northern Michigan but was never in the FFA. He has 2 children that are also in 4-H (ages 10 & 12) and lives in Perry, MI (where they do have FFA in the high school) His family attends church at the local catholic church and they enjoy camping each summer across northern Michigan. The Family Farm & Home customer base includes large & small scale farmers and rural residents who enjoy working outdoors. You have met with Mr. Foster 2 times in the last month, but currently do not sell them any products. At your meeting last week, he asked you to bring him an offer to put your products in 10 of his 50 stores in Michigan as a trial. **(REMEMBER: The product you sold in your individual sales presentation today is the same product that you are using for this Pre-Call Plan practicum. Make sure your Pre-Call Plan presentation is reflective of this customer described above and not the customer you planned for in your sales presentation.)**

The four members of your team must all participate in this Pre-Call Planning process. You now have 15 minutes to prepare a pre-call plan. Upon the completion of the 15 minutes, you will be taken over to your immediate supervisor (the judge) to share your Pre-Call Plan for selling your product to the customer described above. You will have 8-10 minutes to present your Pre-Call Plan to the judge. Be sure to include the following information in your presentation:

1. Four potential questions to build rapport.
2. Four common interests team members have with the customer.
3. Four questions that help identify the wants and needs of the customer
4. Identify four active listening skills used to determine needs and wants.
5. Identify & match four potential needs & wants to the product's features & benefits.
6. Identify four potential objections.
7. Identify 4 potential concerns of the customer.

Note: Students are expected to explain their decisions for the pre-call plan based on selling principles. Additional questions may be asked by the judge to ensure the skill sets have been evaluated.

*Note: Due to the time constraints of your supervisor (the judge), your presentation will be limited to the allotted 10-minute maximum time frame, and you may be stopped if you exceed the 10-minute time allotment.*

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## Telephone Skills Practicum 2024 Michigan FFA Ag. Sales Contest



**T1**

### Background Information:

You are a customer service representative for Pioneer, a company who sells corn, soybean and wheat seed to farmers. You have been working for this company for 5 years and have been given a task to “Cold Call” farmers in Michigan who plant more than 5000 acres of corn, soybeans, and wheat combined, who wants high quality seed and who values service after the sale. Your main focus is to qualify these farmers as prospects for growing Pioneer brand seed.

You are making a call to Chris Simpson, a farmer who plants corn, soybeans and wheat in Clinton County, MI. You got the contact information from publicly available sources, and he/she has no idea that you are calling, or why you are calling (a “cold call”). In the process of calling Chris, you need to build rapport and find out the following information to “qualify” this farmer as a suitable prospect for Pioneer brand seed.

1. Does this farmer plant enough acres to qualify as a seed customer prospect?
2. How many acres of each crop does the farmer plant?
3. Does this farmer value high quality seed and service or do they prefer to just purchase cheap seed?
4. What brand of seed does the farmer currently plant?
5. Is the farmer open to having a Pioneer seed salesperson stop by the farm?

If you can successfully “qualify” the farmer as a prospect, you should set up an appointment for the local Pioneer dealer to visit the farm. If the farmer does not “qualify” as a prospect, then you should still leave a positive impression on the farmer for possible future sales contact.

### Your Assignment:

You will be placing a cold call to the Chris Simpson to qualify him/her as a prospect to purchase Pioneer brand seed.

You have up to 5 minutes to prepare and 6-8 minutes to complete your call.

**\*Call the Judge at \_\_\_\_\_ when you are ready to begin the contest.**

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## Telephone Skills Practicum 2024 Michigan FFA Ag. Sales Contest



**T2**

### Background Information:

You are a customer service representative for Pioneer, a company who sells corn, soybean and wheat seed to farmers. You have been working for this company for 5 years and have been given a task to “Cold Call” farmers in Michigan who plant soybeans, have on-farm storage for soybeans, who wants high quality seed and who values service after the sale. Your main focus is to qualify these farmers as prospects for growing Pioneer brand “Plenish” high oleic soybeans. (“Plenish” high oleic soybeans are a soybean variety that creates a healthier soybean oil that is used to make cooking oils or can be used in dairy cow feeds.)

You are making a call to Chris Simpson, a crop farmer in Clinton County, MI. You got the contact information from publicly available sources, and he/she has no idea that you are calling, or why you are calling (a “cold call”). In the process of calling Chris, you need to build rapport and find out the following information to “qualify” this farmer as a suitable prospect for Pioneer brand “Plenish” high oleic soybeans.

1. Does this farmer plant soybeans? How many acres?
2. Does this farmer have a soybean processing facility in the area and are they willing to ship soybeans to that facility for a price premium?
3. Does the farmer have on-farm storage to store these soybeans separate from other soybeans raised on the farm?
4. Does this farmer have dairy cattle and grow their own feed?
5. Is the farmer open to having a Pioneer seed salesperson stop by the farm?

If you can successfully “qualify” the farmer as a prospect, you should set up an appointment for the local Pioneer dealer to visit the farm. If the farmer does not “qualify” as a prospect, then you should still leave a positive impression on the farmer for possible future sales contact.

### Your Assignment:

You will be placing a cold call to the Chris Simpson to qualify him/her as a prospect to purchase Pioneer brand “Plenish” high oleic soybeans.

You have up to 5 minutes to prepare and 6-8 minutes to complete your call.

**\*Call the Judge at \_\_\_\_\_ when you are ready to begin the contest.**

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