

Sustainable Small-Acreage Farming from Field to Table

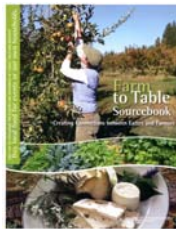
Debra Kollock (Oregon – Professional Development Program Grant)

Project: EW04-015

Title: Sustainable Small-Acreage Farming from Field to Table

Project Coordinator:

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This 16-page sourcebook summarizes the content and process of the retreat.

Participants:

Al Kowitz, Exec. Dir., Community Agriculture Development Center
Richard Hines, Assistant Dir. for Development, WSU Extension
Karen Jurgensen, Chef Instructor, Seattle Culinary Academy
Lora Lea and Rick Mysterly, Owners, Quilliscus Farm School
Marcia Ostrom, Dir., Center for Sustaining Ag and Natural Resources
Terry Swagerty, Small Farm Project Coordinator, WSU Stevens Co. Ext.

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The 28-minute DVD tells the story of how the Quilliscus program changed graduates' food sourcing habits.

Situation:

Agricultural professionals are typically engaged in research and extension activities that address farm challenges in a piecemeal fashion, often attempting to solve a single production problem. This single-discipline focus precludes big picture views of the whole farm, with scant attention paid to the nutritional, culinary and cultural phenomenon associated with community food systems.

In similar fashion, culinary professionals suffer knowledge gaps. They have a high level of expertise regarding raw farm products. But they may lack understanding of how taste, texture and nutritional value of the foods they purchase are influenced by farming practices, timing of harvest or slaughter and on-farm handling before products are shipped to market.

In a previous program, Quilliscus Farm School of Domestic Arts in Rice, Wash., sought to fill chef knowledge gaps by inviting 48 chefs-in-training from 10 culinary schools in Oregon and Washington and six culinary professionals to the farm for experience in the field. Attendees cared for animals, helped make cheese, worked under a professional chef to select, harvest and prepare fresh herbs and vegetables and participated in sessions on sustainable agriculture led by neighboring farmers and orchardists.

The success with these culinary students suggested similar on-farm immersion could yield similar knowledge-infusing results for agricultural professionals.

Objectives:

By providing in-depth experience in the flow of food from field to table, agricultural professionals will:

- Know how to incorporate seasonal foods into a menu
- Understand nutritional benefits of eating local and seasonal foods
- Connect better with local farmers in their communities
- Incorporate the experience and learning into their own educational programs
- Understand sustainability issues small farms face
- Understand how sustainable food production offers small farms distinctive challenges and opportunities
- Become part of a network among university, agency and culinary personnel
- Observe a well developed model of the movement to a community food system from the traditional producer food system
- Learn that a small farm with sound business and marketing practices can be sustainable

Actions:

The project team invited 24 agricultural professionals, out of a pool of 55 applicants, from Idaho (4), Montana (4), Massachusetts (1), Oregon (2) and Washington (13) to live and work at Quilliscus Farm in two five-day retreats, 12 professionals at each in October 2004 and October 2005. Using farmers as educators, the Quilliscus training model allowed professionals to observe, ask questions and learn through a multidisciplinary hands-on approach. Among their activities, the professionals:

- Toured neighboring farms to learn about production systems, marketing strategies and efforts at building community
- Discussed the 'word of the day' (i.e. 'respect' and 'grateful') and the words' implications each morning at breakfast
- Engaged in sessions for reflection and discussions
- Heard presentations from university faculty on healthy community food systems
- Prepared and served food from products raised at Quilliscus and neighboring farms



Outcomes and Impacts:



Post-workshop surveys confirmed that participants found the program worthwhile; it added to their knowledge, provided material for future use and rejuvenated their enthusiasm.

Responses to an onsite evaluation survey, completed by 20 participants, showed:

- For all but one, the retreat had a moderate or significant impact on their understanding of sustainable practices.
- All said the program did a good or excellent job of helping them learn how food can move from the field to the table.
- All better understood how small farmers can work together to produce and sell their products.
- The retreat had a moderate (30%) or significant (70%) impact on understanding of how the local family farm contributes to the local community and economy.

The project yielded these products:

- Farm to Table: The Culinary Connection DVD. This 28-minute DVD tells the story of those who have experienced the Quilliscus program and how it affected their food sourcing habits.
- Farm to Table Sourcebook: Creating Connections Between Eaters and Farmers. The 16-page illustrated book focuses on four questions:
 - Is it good for the eater?
 - Is it good for the farmer?
 - Is it good for the community?
 - Is it good for the earth?
- Website, http://communityagcenter.org/SAR_Farm_To_Table/Introduction.htm

Potential Contributions:

Agricultural professionals who participated in this program now have a much broader vision of marketing options for small farm products.

From their experiences, it becomes clear that this learning design model can be extended more broadly in extension programming. It can be especially relevant when the objectives involve connections between local citizens and farmers and changing the buying and eating habits of these citizens.

