Fresh, From Our Family to Yours: Direct Marketing Education for Producers

PlacerGROWN Board of Directors (Research and Education Grant Program)

Project Number: SW04-058

Title: Fresh, From Our Family to Yours: Direct Marketing Education for Producers

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Francis Thompson, center, of Newcastle Produce assists customers at the Foothills Farmers Market.

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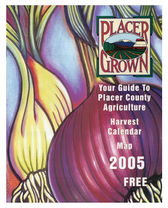

The guide to Placer County agriculture was produced with help from Joanne Neft.

SARE Grant: $98,395

Situation:

Development pressure in Placer County, the fastest growing in the state, is threatening agriculture. Subdivisions and strip malls are covering once-fertile farmland. The result: a dwindling proportion of Placer County residents are connected to the land and local food systems or understand their significance.

Helping local producers find new marketing channels could strengthen their economic viability to resist development pressures and preserve the county's quality of life.

Objectives:

- Help producers identify, address, and cultivate new markets
- Teach producers how to market themselves as sources of agricultural products of superior flavor and freshness in Placer County's suburban centers and beyond
- Increase the resiliency of the agricultural community to development pressures

PlacerGROWN Harvest Boxes are prepared for delivery to CSA customers. – Photos by Roger Ingram

Actions:

The project team took a multidimensional approach to help producers promote and market locally grown products:

- Conducted a producer survey to identify marketing channels of greatest producer interest and a consumer survey to assess attitudes and preferences regarding local produce and producers.
- Guided by a producer-led steering committee, conducted an opening retreat in 2005, and subsequent meetings in 2006 and 2007, to develop and implement plans to cultivate new marketing channels and to craft strategies for providing farmers with resources to cultivate those channels.
- Conducted farmer-to-farmer networking meetings to promote relationship building and develop project collaboration.
- Planned and held annual PlacerGROWN Food and Farm conferences that showcased innovative and successful marketing ideas and models. These included marketing workshops to educate producers on meeting needs and requirements of consumers and produce buyers.
- Worked with local producers to pilot, develop, and operate a collaborative CSA, from which evolved a manual, "Collaborative Community Supported Agriculture: A New Direct Marketing Opportunity for Placer County Producers."

Results:

Community Supported Agriculture

After a successful CSA pilot in 2006, PlacerGROWN helped producers offer the PlacerGROWN Harvest Box, a weekly delivery of fruits and vegetables. The customer base doubled to 50 and the length of season doubled to 16 weeks, resulting in delivery of 739 boxes. The CSA targeted workplaces, including Placer County, Kaiser Hospital, Sierra College, and the City of Roseville.

A survey of subscribers showed that:

- 65% loved the harvest box
- 63% would subscribe again
- 95% liked the convenience

Promotional brochures for Placer County's mandarin growers and wine producers.

Mountain Mandarin Growers' Association

PlacerGROWN helped develop the association, working with mandarin growers to develop a logo, website (www.mountainmandarins.com), marketing brochure, and the Mountain Mandarin Tour. PlacerGROWN helped the association obtain a grant to place an ad in *Sunset* magazine that included a reader response card that generated 700 requests. PlacerGROWN responded by sending the PlacerGROWN Local Food Guide and other PlacerGROWN material.

Direct Marketing to Restaurants

In 2005, PlacerGROWN worked with project participants to launch a promotion, "Placer County Wines and Dines," to introduce products to restaurants. PlacerGROWN facilitated and organized two meetings between farmers and restaurateurs, including a tasting at a local vineyard, to assess opportunities and barriers for buying local produce, meat, and wine. Five restaurants became members of PlacerGROWN, and a restaurant listing was added to the Local Food Guide and website.

Wine and Tourism Brochure

Placer County's 10 wineries received assistance to develop a brochure and marketing plan. Fifty thousand brochures were distributed at local events and outlets, and the wineries distributed the brochure to their mailing lists. Through an ad in *Sunset* magazine, 300 brochures were mailed in response to reader requests.

Institutional Buyers

The Foothills Farmers Market Association and PlacerGROWN developed a relationship with Kaiser Permanente to host a farmers market at a large Kaiser facility and offer harvest boxes to employees.

Branding, Marketing, Farm Stories, and Outreach

Workshops and meetings focused on branding and marketing family farms. The PlacerGROWN website (www.placergrown.org) and newsletter were redesigned. The newsletter, published quarterly with distribution of 2,500, features farmers and their stories, lists of locally available products, recipes, events calendar, and more.

Bumper Sticker.

Potential Benefits/Impacts:

The most important impact has been increasing producer knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and skills.

- Small-scale producers better understand opportunities and challenges of direct marketing
- They have more tools with which to work, including community supported agriculture, marketing to restaurants and retailers, and on-farm events and promotions
- They have experience with networking, teamwork, and problem-solving