

Developing a Sustainable Market for Small Farms in a Rural Community

Diane Green (Idaho – *Farmer/Rancher Grant*)

Project Number: FW01-025

Title: Developing a Sustainable Market for Small Farms in a Rural Community

Producer:

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Diane and Thom at Greentree Naturals near Sandpoint, Idaho.

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Cooperators:

Pat VanVolkinberg, Bountiful Organics Farm
Mikki Clark, Almost Eden Farm
Vicki Benner, Rivendell Farm
Linda Watt, Wattcliff Farm



Brochures created during the market development project.

Western SARE Grant: \$7,385

Situation:

In the Sandpoint area of northern Idaho – characteristic of many Northwest communities – consumers typically buy out-of-state, out-of-season produce during the local growing season. Still, demand for locally grown, fresh organic produce is increasing in Bonner County, Idaho, and other communities of the Pacific Northwest.

Developing consumer knowledge about how and when to shop for locally grown produce is a first step in market development. Educating the public to support the marketing and distribution of local produce could, in turn, help create sustainable income for small farms and market gardeners.

Documenting the process for market development could serve as a model for other communities in similar circumstances.



Cooperator Mikki Clark harvests onions at Almost Eden Farm.



A market basket of produce assembled for sale.

Objectives:

1. Promote grassroots community support for small farms by developing a model for “growing” a local food system
2. Develop information pamphlets, publications, growers surveys and workshops for sharing information in northern Idaho
3. Develop a local website for sharing information with other regional communities beyond northern Idaho

Actions:

Greentree Naturals works with an established group of certified organic producers known as the Growers’ Collective, part- and full-time farmers organized to meet increased demands of the marketplace. They grow primarily specialty vegetables, herbs, salad greens and cut flowers, selling at local the local farmers market, local restaurants and through a small community supported agriculture project.

Grower Survey:

A grower survey was conducted to establish the needs of small acreage and market garden producers, which would help in determining types of brochures to produce.



Brochures:

Three brochures were developed.

1. **“Buy Locally Grown Food and Help Sustain Local Farms”**
Describes the impacts of transporting produce long distances and how locally grown food:
 - Typically tastes better
 - Has higher levels of nutrition
 - Supports local farm families
 - Builds community
 - Preserves open space
 - Preserves genetic diversity
2. **“Tips for Selling What You Grow”**
Describes approaches to three market venues – farmers markets, restaurants and community supported agriculture – and offers Greentree Naturals’ basic rules for success:
 - Sell the best, compost the rest
 - Never promise something you can’t deliver and always deliver everything you promise
 - Offer a satisfaction guarantee with all of your products
3. **“Working with a Growers Collective”**
Offers tips for developing and operating a grower collective – a group of small acreage producers who market their produce collectively – based on the model and experiences of the Sandpoint area Growers Collective.

Presentations:

Project coordinator Diane Green presented half a dozen one-day regional workshops and two five-week workshop series in 2001 and 2002. Topics included:

- How to sell at a farmers market
- Organic gardening and natural pest control
- Small farm marketing
- Extending the growing season

Website:

The website, www.greentreenaturals.com, was launched in June 2002.

Results:

The project team developed and distributed 400 copies each of the three brochures.

As a result of the June 9, 2002, presentation in Noxon, Montana, attended by 19 people, the Noxon Farmers Market was opened in August 2002 with 12 vendors.

Workshops conducted in 2001 and 2002 on organic gardening and natural pest control prompted nine growers, half of the 18 attending, to become certified organic growers and all to improve their growing practices.

During a workshop on season extension techniques, 20 of the 24 attendees built hoophouses to extend the season at their gardens and small acreage farms.

The website received more than 8,000 “hits” during the course of the project.

Potential Benefits:

The project created a model not only for setting up farmers markets, but also for making presentations on topics related to organic production and ways to update and extend information to both new and seasoned gardeners and market farmers



Diane Green cuts zinnias.



Harvesting garlic scapes.