

Final Results

FW01-025

Developing a sustainable market for small farms in a rural community

Location:

Sandpoint, Idaho

Funding Period:

Apr. 15, 2001-Dec. 31, 2002

Grant Award:

\$7,385

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OBJECTIVES

The project promotes grassroots community support for local small acreage farms by developing a model for growing a local food system.

ABSTRACT

The project developed three information pamphlets, surveyed growers, conducted workshops and presentations and developed a Web site to share marketing information with rural communities in northern Idaho and beyond.

SPECIFIC RESULTS

The grower survey, handed out in spring 2001 at the Sandpoint Farmers Market and market meeting, was developed to establish the needs of market gardeners and small acreage producers in the county. Of 65 members receiving the survey, eight responded. Their growing area ranged between 1 and 10 acres and their crops and products included cut flowers, herbs, assorted vegetables, hay, barley, wheat and goat cheese. None were certified organic but several said their customers wanted chemical-free produce. Seven of the eight marketed their flowers, produce and herbs at the local farmers market, and one sold mostly through a CSA in Noxon, Mont.

Respondents said they wanted to learn more about working together, starting their own CSA and promoting and marketing their produce. To reduce costs, they want to buy supplies like soil amendments, packaging material and growing supplies as a group.

As a result of information gained from the survey, the project team published three brochures: *Working with a Growers Collective*; *Tips for Selling What You Grow and Buy Locally Grown Food*; and *Help Sustain Local Farms*. About 400 of each were handed out at the Sandpoint Farmers Market, the Bonner and Boundary county extension offices, at regionwide Rural Roots meetings and at University of Idaho and University of Washington events.

The project launched a Web site in June 2002, www.greentreenaturals.com, to provide information and serve as a model for other small acreage farms across the region.

“The Web site has already had over 8,000 ‘hits’ and small acreage producers across the U.S. are writing encouraging responses as well as signing up for our quarterly newsletter,” says project coordinator Diane Green in her SARE final report. Creating the Web site – content, layout, design – took more time than expected, and the site remains “a work in progress.” Still, Green says she has learned much despite challenges of time and money.

Green made several presentations during the spring and summer of 2001 and 2002 that targeted consumers, gardeners and small acreage owners in the region. On June 9, 2002, in Noxon, Mont., 19 people attended a presentation on how to sell at farmers markets. As a result, the first Noxon Farmers Market opened with 12 vendors Aug. 2002.

Green conducted a workshop series – five classes, three hours each over five weeks – on organic gardening and natural pest control at Greentree Naturals June 3 through July 15 in 2001 and 2002.

Ten people attended in 2001 and eight in 2002. Of these, half certified organic and all planned to improve their growing practices. The workshops were offered free to students apprenticing at area organic farms. Twenty-two people attended a workshop on small farm marketing March 13 in Colville, Wash., and 18 attended March 19 at Bonners Ferry. Green says she has maintained contact with many who attended, serving as a “long-distance mentor” as they explore opportunities for expanding their marketing skills.

She organized, facilitated and presented a workshop April 6, 2002, at a Spring Fling Workshop, sponsored by Rural Roots, a nonprofit organization. The daylong activity included workshops covering vegetable and flower production, season extension, seed selection and marketing techniques. Nineteen people attended.

On April 19, 2001, and April 20, 2002, the project team presented a workshop on extending the growing season at Greentree Naturals. Twelve people attended each session. Utilizing hands-on and how-to guides, 20 of the 24 built hoop houses to extend the season at their gardens and small-acreage farms.

Green also designed a brochure for, and helped plan, a one-day Organic Growers Workshop in November 2002 attended by 38 people.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Green has created a model not only for setting up farmers markets but for making presentations on topics related to organic production and continuing to update and extend information for new and seasoned gardeners and farmers marketers.

FARMER ADOPTION AND DIRECT IMPACT

As a result of the brochures, workshops and Web site, several producers have become certified organic growers, and many have improved their growing practices, including the adoption of organic and natural pest-control methods.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS OR NEW HYPOTHESES

Green notes that numerous challenges arose during the project, including one cooperator group abandoning its commitment to the project and the two farms suffering personal tribulations that reduced crop production.

DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

The information developed in this project has been distributed as three brochures (about 400 copies of each), through several workshops held throughout the region and on the project Web site, which had received more than 8,000 hits as of the completion of this final report.

PRODUCER INVOLVEMENT

In addition to project coordinator Diane Green, four other organic farmers participated in the project in varying degrees proportional to limitations, including physical injury and family hardship.