Beyond Fresh
Expanding Markets for Sustainable Value-Added Food Products in Texas
Southern SARE Research & Education Project #LS14-264
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Objectives
1. Research opportunities for value-added processing of sustainably grown fruits and vegetables in Texas, with special attention to the appropriate scale of production.
2. Increase the sales and profitability of value-added products by sustainable and organic fruit and vegetable growers in Texas.
3. Educate and organize growers, facilitating key decisions about topics such as appropriate business structures, values-based branding, sustainability requirements, and scale of production.
4. Cultivate increased collaboration, coordination, and support for value-added enterprise development in the sustainable and organic sector by strengthening inter-industry value chains and rural-urban linkages.

Methods
- Put a high-caliber product development team to work for the small- and mid-sized sustainable and organic farms of Texas.
- Conducted a market study of barriers and opportunities to value-added product development in Texas.
- Interviewed farmers, retail and wholesale food buyers, processors, packers, rural community economic development leaders, food banks, commercial kitchen owners, regulators, and enterprise funders.
- Contracted with Oklahoma State University to research appropriate processing scale for candidate food products, including recommendations for equipment, production methods, labeling, and packaging.
- Contracted with Texas A&M University to do an economic impact study for rural Texas communities.
- Offered workshops, relationship-building events, media training for farmers, and hosted a gathering of policy makers and economic development directors from small towns within 40 miles of Austin.

Findings
- Excellent opportunities for direct-market farmers in Texas to create value-added food enterprises.
- Products need to be chosen carefully because very few are profitable.
- Start small, fail early. Farmers are already massed out on risk.
- Huge value in cottage food laws. While not worth it to leave the farm and use commercial kitchens.
- Adding local + sustainable + value added does not multiply the price consumers will pay.
- Good opportunities to sell ingredients to food manufacturers.
- Wholesale market opportunities are just beginning to develop. More work is needed to build them.

Accomplishments and Products
- Helped to create a new Texas Center for Local Food, chosen by USDA as one of 13 USDA FoodLINC centers nationally.
- A new directory of resources for local food enterprises in Texas.
- A new workbook for growers, taking a Farmer First approach to planning value-added food enterprises.
- Cost calculators that can be used to explore value-added processing at any scale.
- Value chain coordination: Hosted meetings to bridge gaps and leverage networks, creating many promising new relationships between farmers, entrepreneurs, and public officials.
- Case studies of value-added food enterprises in Texas and the Southern SARE Region.
- Expanded and improved section on Value-Added Food Products on the ATTRA website.

Project Team
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