



Southwest Marketing Network

Expanding Markets for Southwest Small-Scale, Alternative, and Minority Producers

Promoting Local Agricultural Marketing in the Southwest

September 2003

Farm to School Special Issue

Why are we covering Farm to School in this issue? The Southwest Marketing Network is dedicated to information sharing with farmers, ranchers, and the people who work with them with the focus on developing new markets for agricultural products throughout the Four Corners states. We explored different aspects of the farm to school movement at the Durango conference in the Spring and it appears to be a growing market opportunity for agricultural producers here. Read on for more details about this exciting trend.

We are a nation where childhood obesity is becoming epidemic, school lunch programs are serving high calorie fast foods, and farmers are finding fewer direct links to higher value markets.

Family farming in the United States is at a crossroad. With increasing costs for land and water, the growth of agribusiness, and shrinking markets due to globalization, growers find themselves selling the farm in order to feed their own families. Farm income is also in decline. The farmer's share of the food dollar has dropped from 41 cents in 1950 to 20 cents in 1999. Many farms remain in business only because family members have other jobs and provide off-farm income.

Farm to School programs work to counteract these negative trends by offering new markets to farmers and by incorporating healthy, nutritious produce into school lunches, snacks and salad bars. Anyone who has picked a tomato right off the vine knows that a great tasting tomato is synonymous with freshness. We want kids to know that fresh

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Farm to School: Who Benefits?

Schoolchildren with a closer connection to their food and agriculture. Research on nutrition education methods increasingly suggests that there is a link between long term healthy eating behaviors and experiential learning that begins early in life. The more a child is involved with food—either through gardening, farming, cooking or other “real life” food experiences—the more likely he or she will adopt healthy eating behaviors as a life long practice.

Local farmers with increased sales opportunities. Local schools give farmers a chance to diversify their markets, which is especially important when farmers are dependent on limited commodity or wholesale markets. Schools represent a reliable and steady demand that is known in advance to farmers. This allows farmers to establish better controls on planting, harvesting, and marketing.

Communities with locally-based agricultural marketing. When farm sales stay within a community, the local economy benefits from financial recycling. Healthy farms provide jobs, pay taxes, and keep working agricultural land open. Undeveloped farmland has its own set of local benefits that include lower cost of community services, open space, diversified wildlife habitat, greater food security, and flood control.

Public policy with a closer link between taxpayer support for agriculture and food assistance programs. Child nutrition programs are heavily supported by federal funds. A relatively small number of agriculture commodity growers are federally supported. The distribution of these supports is weighted in favor of a few regions of the country. If federal food assistance monies for child nutrition were targeted for the purchase of food produced near schools, there would be a more equitable distribution of federal food expenditures between farmers and regions.

By Mark Winne, Hartford Food System

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produce tastes great! When combined with nutrition education, farm visits, school gardens, and education in the classroom, children can develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. In doing so, they can decrease the risk of experiencing food related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. We also hope they learn something about the importance of farming in the region.

Case Studies

Santa Monica: The energy and enthusiasm of one parent, a local farmer, and the farmers' market manager was the impetus for a district-wide Farmers' Market Salad Bar. The School's Food Service Director was open to a pilot project in 1997 at one school as long as a parent was willing to do most of the organizational work. That project was a success and the Farm to School Project now encompasses 26 schools in the county, including elementary, middle and high schools. Each school has a farmers' market salad bar, which features farm products that are purchased at local farmers' markets. Because of the year-round growing season



photo by Pam Roy

Enjoying the choices at a fresh, local salad bar at school.

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and the year-round farmers' markets, the project is able to always include local produce.

Over the course of a year, about 20 farmers provide produce for the salad bar, and the district spends about \$100,000 total at two local farmers' markets. This project has improved child nutrition by making healthy, fresh, and tasty food available, especially in schools with a high proportion of students eligible for free or reduced priced meals. 32% of the students choose the salad bar. This project not only offers healthier choices in the cafeteria but also makes connections between what is happening in the cafeteria to environmental and nutrition education in the classroom, garden, and field. A nutritionist introduces children to the items found at the salad bar. Gardens flourish at every school in the district. Field trips to farms and to farmers' markets link the students with the food they enjoy each day in their school cafeteria. (Tracie Thomas, 310-450-8338, x342 or email: payton@smmusd.org)

Many other states have developed unique programs to introduce fresh local produce into school lunch programs. In New York, the Cornell Farm to School Program, in collaboration with schools in Johnson City and Hannibal, buys local produce from farmers and also obtains local items through their produce brokers. In Iowa the GROWN Locally Cooperative supplies 4 schools in Decorah County. The New North Florida Cooperative Association sells a large volume of washed, cut, and packaged vegetables to local school districts. Through Homegrown Wisconsin, a cooperative of 25 member organic farms, 41,000 students at the University of Wisconsin at Madison have access to local apples, potatoes, blue corn tortillas, and ground beef in the dining halls on a regular basis.

In Our Own Backyard:

Numerous states and communities have been testing Farm to School programs. In 2001 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 3 public schools were chosen for a 3-year pilot project including two elementary schools and a high school. One school offers a daily salad bar, another offers a side salad with seasonal items such as tomatoes, carrots and melons, and the

Educating Our Children, Reconnecting to the Land

Around the country, there are exciting new educational activities happening, all with the idea to reconnect children with what they eat, the farmers that produce it, and the wonders of the natural world.

Cooking with Kids (Santa Fe, Lynn Walters) has developed a successful program of hands-on multicultural food education and developed an integrated curriculum that also has ties to cooking in the cafeteria.

Food Education Every Day (Vermont, Enid Wonnacott) combines farmer presentations, school gardens, farm tours, and, for a little extra spice, an alteration of the state educational standards with requisites that only school gardens can fulfill.

Farm to Table's Farm to School Program (Santa Fe, Le Adams) takes kids on field trips to farms, showcases farmers in classrooms, and runs hands on activities for children at the local farmers' market.

Healthy Schools Project (Ventura County, CA, Marilyn Godfrey) uses school gardens as a learning venue, has enhanced classroom nutrition education, and runs farm tours, all in addition to school salad bars.

Slow Food Denver (Denver, Matthew Jones) teaches kids about food sources, good taste and nutrition, and cooking, using school gardens.

These programs, along with many others, combine fresh food variety tastings, farm tours, hands-on cooking classes, experiential school gardens, farm life, local history, community building at community gardens, biology and botany, farmer presentations, changes in educational standards, tours at farmers' markets and many other methods to help children remember the ways of their grandparents—back to an understanding of the land and its resources, to an appreciation of agriculture, farmers, and the wonder that nurturing a growing plant can produce.

For more information about these and other similar programs contact: Le Adams, Farm to Table, 505-473-1004, email: ladams@cybermesa.com

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high school serves a salad bar as a separate meal choice. Two more schools have been added to the program since the pilot project began, and there is potential for more additions.

Currently, the Santa Fe pilot project is being supplied by a group of Northern New Mexico farmers through the Santa Fe Family Farmers' Cooperative. Sarah Grant, Manager for the Coop states from her experience, "The program has been a real education trying to match the needs of the farmers to the needs of the school system." Lynn Walters, the Director of "Cooking with Kids" and Craig Mapel, Marketing Specialist for the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, have worked closely with the schools and public officials to develop this pilot program. Their research continues to assess the interest of public schools in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Española and Taos. To give an example of the potential demand for the School Lunch Program, the Albuquerque School District serves 39,000 lunches a day on average and 10,000 lunches per day in their summer program. Currently, the pilot program is being partially funded by Farm to



photo by Le Adams

A full array of apple varieties to taste at the farmers' market.

Table through a USDA Community Food Project Grant and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.

An additional program, which focuses on food and education, is now being developed at the Corrales (NM) Elementary School through the leadership of Bonnie Gonzales, Director of the Corrales Farm, Education, and Marketing Program.

Due to this demand for locally grown produce and the potential for farmers to develop a long-term marketing opportunity, Farm to Table is partnering with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and the Regional Development Corporation, to produce a statewide feasibility study to find out 1) if farmers are interested in selling to schools, 2) what they need to transition to such a program, and 3) what price is necessary to make it profitable. The study will assess what school districts are interested in this type of program. If the study proves that there is adequate supply and demand, further work will be done to develop an appropriate program.

In the Southwest, farmers and ranchers have an increasing opportunity to diversify their sales by selling to institutions. Many times this can be through a contractual agreement that will help farmers plan for school needs. The schools can accommodate a portion of the school lunch program to include local produce and products. Some of the challenges to consider are quality standards and



photo by Le Adams

An apple tastes better if you know where it is grown.

cleanliness. Many schools have small and sometimes very minimal food preparation areas, so the products they receive need to be ready to serve. Schools need to receive a product that requires very little handling and many times, no further cleaning. Some states like Florida and Kentucky have found that the development of marketing cooperatives has assisted in creating the type of facility that is helpful for farmers to arrange the sales, receive the raw product, clean, package and transport their product to its final destination. Jeff Jones, USDA Rural Development, Lexington, KY, comments that, "It's difficult for a single farm to take care of all aspects of production, contracting, and marketing, and being part of a cooperative can help relieve some of these burdens."

The future of our communities is in the children. Providing our children and youth with the avenues to good food, proper nutrition, and respect for the bounty of the earth will improve all of our lives. Farm to School programs are a welcome trend. Hop on board!

For their help in producing these articles, special thanks go to the Community Food Security Coalition's Marion Kalb, National Farm to School Director, Thomas Forster, Policy Director, and Kristen Markley, Farm to College Program Manager; Mark Winne, Executive Director of the Hartford Food System; Debra Tropp, USDA Agriculture Marketing Service; and Sarah Grant, Santa Fe Family Farmers' Cooperative.

Pam Roy and Le Adams



photo by Le Adams

Learning the skills of weed-pulling at a local farm.

Improving the School Vending Machine

In addition to school lunch programs and educational efforts, the vending machine has become a rallying point for several school districts across the country. Here are a few facts from Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser (extensively footnoted with citations):

- **The rate of obesity in the US is double what it was in the '60s. In children, it is double what it was in the '70s. The children of the United States are now the "fattest, least fit generation ever."**
- **The average American now consumes three hamburgers and four orders of french fries per week.**
- **The Center for Science in the Public Interest calls Coke "liquid candy." Each can contains 10 teaspoons of sugar. A significant number of teen boys are drinking 5 cans per day.**
- **30 % of American public high schools now sell fast food inside the schools.**

The temptation of high-sugar, high-fat junk food is all around today's children. Money earned from the addition of vending machines is often critical to special programs in the schools. Is it possible to have the machines, the revenue, and healthy choices? Several districts are saying Yes!

The Los Angeles Unified School District (the second largest school district in the nation) unanimously passed a motion banning soda sales in every school in the district by January 2004. The Committee for Commercial-Free Schools is working toward policy change in the Seattle area. Sodas are gone from 3 out of 4 middle schools in Ventura County. What has taken their place is "Switch" (fruit juice and carbonated water.) Craig Mapel, Marketing Specialist for New Mexico Department of Agriculture, is working on packaging and other issues to offer New Mexico grown products such as pistachios and pecans as vending machine alternatives.

Some of these projects are large; others are small. It is the determination of parents, teachers, students, and other community activists organizing in the name of good health that is achieving success around the country.

Improving Local Food Policy

At least 68 school districts around the country currently operate farm to school programs. Fresh local food in school cafeterias is a welcome, growing trend.

To facilitate the development of farm to school programs and the benefits they have for children and farmers, the Community Food Security Coalition has developed a proposal for inclusion in the Child Nutrition Act, scheduled for reauthorization by Congress in 2003. Known as *Growing Healthy Kids: American Farms Feed American Children*, the proposal would establish a competitive grant program of up to \$100,000 per school district from an annual appropriation of \$10 million. Funds could be used by school districts and community-based non-profit organizations to pay for development and start-up costs associated with farm to school programs. These could include the purchase of equipment and storage facilities, staff training, the development of procurement and delivery systems, menu planning, and the development of experiential nutrition education programs including farm tours, and the construction of school food gardens.

The Child Nutrition Program is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture. This program funnels more than \$16 billion annually to local school districts through state departments of education. The annual food portion of that funding is more than \$8 billion, a small portion of which, if directed through school meal programs to farms, could make a significant impact on the vitality of local agriculture. And as early reports indicate, the best approach to nutrition education is to begin it early in childhood and to teach it through experiential learning methods. The hope is that schools can help children develop a lifetime of healthy eating behaviors while child nutrition programs can support farmers and the development of viable local agricultural businesses.

More information can be found at www.foodsecurity.org/policy.



Our Goal

The goal of this project is to ensure that new, existing, and prospective Southwest producers—especially small-scale, alternative, and minority producers—have the connections with others, technical and financial assistance, marketing information, business and marketing skills, and peer examples needed to improve their marketing success as a means to improve their profitability, viability, and numbers.



Sustainable Foods Event in Winslow

After a very successful event last March, the Center for Sustainable Environments is planning the second annual “Sustainable Foods from the Four Corners”. It is scheduled to take place at the Historic La Posada Hotel, in Winslow, AZ on October 18, 2003. The daylong event will include cooking demonstrations, a regional marketplace, presentations, and lectures. The day will culminate in an evening banquet created with foods from the Four Corners Region. All daytime events and activities are free and open to the public. For more information on the event, travel information, or to be a vendor at the marketplace please call Julie Evans at 922-523-0330, email her at: events.cse@nau.edu or visit www.environment.nau.edu

This event is produced by the Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University and co-sponsored by Slow Foods USA, the Museum of Northern Arizona, La Posada’s Turquoise Room and the Southwest Marketing Network (SWMN).

Farm to School Resources

Books

- Food Politics, How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, by Marion Nestle
- Coming Home to Eat, The Politics and Pleasures of Local Foods*, by Gary Paul Nabhan
- Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, by Eric Schlosser

Articles

- The Geography of Health, Whole Earth Magazine, Spring, 2002
- Bringing Local Food to Local People: A Resource Guide for Farm-to-School and Farm-to-Institution Programs by NCAT Agriculture Specialists Barbara C. Bellows, Rex Dufour, and Janet Bachmann, March, 2003. Available free from ATTRA, 1-800-346-9140 or www.attra.ncat.org
- The appendices to this publication include “Programs providing funding and assistance for farm to school or farm to institution programs”, “Publications”, “USDA programs that address farm to school programs”, “2002 Farm Bill provisions that affect farm to school programs”, “Farm to school programs by state, with contact information.”
- How Local Farmers and School Food Service Buyers are Building Alliances by Debra Tropp and Surajudeen Olowolayemo, 2000, USDA Ag Marketing Service. www.ams.usda.gov/direct-marketing/publications.htm

- Innovative Marketing Opportunities for Small Farmers: Local Schools as Customers, by Schofer, Holmes, Richardson, and Connerly, 2003 (reviewed). USDA, AMS
- Community Food Security News – Farm to Cafeteria Issue. Spring 2003. Full of detailed information and case examples. 310-822-5410, email: cfsc@foodsecurity.org, www.foodsecurity.org

People

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Southwest Marketing Network Conference Scheduled for Next Spring

March 14, 15, and 16, 2004, Flagstaff, AZ

This conference is especially designed for representatives of groups of producers interested in local marketing, local food groups, as well as agents, specialists, and other service providers. With last year’s conference such a success, it should be an excellent opportunity for training, discussions, and planning of collaborative projects to further local food and fiber marketing in the Four Corners states. Let us know if you would like to receive more information. 505-473-1004.

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Major funders of this project are
the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and
USDA, Risk Management Agency

Agricultural Marketing Calendar of Events

September 12-13, 2003 • From Grass to Edible Gardens: Introduction to Permaculture, High Altitude Companion Gardening, Sheet Mulching & Soil Building, Hesperus, CO
Contact: www.oakhavenpc.org/bin/pc?workshop=030912

September 20, 2003 • Is “Long-Term Rest” the Answer to the Grazing Debate? Outdoor Classroom, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, NM Contact: 505-820-2544 or email: projects@quiviracoalition.org

September 28, 2003 • Extending Your Growing Season, Oakhaven Permaculture Center, Hesperus, CO
Contact: www.oakhavenpc.org/bin/pc?workshop=030928

October 6-9, 2003 • Survival Strategies Conference, San Diego, CA Contact: US Dept of Agriculture, Risk Management Agency, 202-314-4713 or www.rma.usda.gov/calendar/2003/october.html

October 17-19, 2003 • Bioneers Conference, San Rafael, CA Contact: www.bioneers.org

October 18, 2003 • Sustainable Foods from the Four Corners, La Posada, Winslow, AZ
See more about this event on page 6.
Contact: Julye Evans, 928-523-0330, email: events.cse@nau.edu or www.environment.nau.edu

Go to www.swmarketing.ncat.org to find updated information on the Southwest Marketing Network and other activities in our region.