



Southwest Marketing Network

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

Promoting Local Agricultural Marketing in the Southwest

October 2008

Who will farm the future?

Young people are growing up all the time, but how many Southwest youth will grow up to be farmers?

Given the aging farming population in the Southwest and throughout the country, this is an important question to ask, and a difficult one to answer. More and more farmers and ranchers are reaching retirement age without clear succession plans, and it is often easier to find a developer to sell farmland to than to pass the business on to a family member or other prospective producer. Young people in both rural and urban areas are rarely encouraged by schools or their families to pursue agriculture as a career. While the farming and ranching lifestyle is increasingly romanticized, few see them as occupations capable of providing for a family. With the average age of a Southwestern farm operator approximately 53, many are concerned that agriculture has lost a whole generation and may lose another. Thankfully, there are also many, young and old, that refuse to lose hope.

A number of initiatives have sprung up in recent years in the Southwest and throughout the country to help introduce young people to agriculture (often through Farm to School programs) and to support beginning farmers of all ages. Several of these were highlighted in the youth sessions at May’s SWMN conference in Santa Fe. For example, Camino de Paz is a Montessori school serving middle and high school aged youth that teaches all of its subjects through hands-on farm-work. Camino de Paz students sell what they grow throughout the year (thanks to a passive solar greenhouse) at the Santa Fe Farmers’ Market. Eight students presented at the session and, when asked how many planned to be farmers, nearly all raised their hands.

Another group that presented was the NM Acequia Association’s Sembrando Semillas, also located in

northern New Mexico. Two of the youth involved in this program are farming several acres of grains to feed a natural pork operation. And students at the South Valley Academy, a charter high school in the Albuquerque area, are cultivating more than an acre of vegetables they sell at two farmers’ markets and through CSA shares. These youth proudly wear t-shirts proclaiming their participation in “Rock Star Farming.”

Meanwhile, in Arizona, Flagstaff Youth Gardens, an organization which helps the community develop garden projects that engage youth, hosts an annual summer internship program through which high-school students are paid to learn farming techniques, market their produce, carry out community service projects and mentor younger students. Past interns have helped to develop three youth-led gardens in the area. The Youth Garden Project in Moab, Utah offers a similar program as well as an agriculture class in the high school, afterschool

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programs in the garden and a partnership with two juvenile detention facilities to allow youth to carry out community service hours in agricultural work.

This is just a small sample of the kinds of programs that are helping to introduce youth to agriculture. There are also a host of projects dedicated to college students and beginning farmers of all ages. At the University of New Mexico, the Research Service Learning Program gives students academic credit to assist in community garden projects. Out of last year's participants, three students actually dropped out of school to start full-time farms. Utah State University is in the planning stages for a 5-acre organic farm to be cultivated by students who will use the farm both for research and to learn production and marketing techniques.

Colorado State University's Cooperative Extension has been at the forefront of efforts to provide hands-on help to beginning farmers. Last year they hosted an 8-week course in Boulder County for which experienced farmers were brought in to educate beginning farmers about production techniques and business practices. The course was followed up by a mentorship program which pays experienced farmers to provide as-needed advice for newer farmers. The successful project is being expanded to SW Colorado and may provide a model for other states. (Information on the program can be found at <http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/boulder/AG/smallfarms.shtml>).

For those already working on youth and beginning farmer development projects, or those inspired by these

examples to start one, there's good news from the 2008 Farm Bill. Thanks to pressure from the Land Stewardship Project, the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and many other organizations, for the first time ever, \$75 million dollars was appropriated for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. Through this program both public and private non-profit organizations can apply for up to \$250,000 in grant funding for new farmer and rancher development activities like those described above. The Request for Proposals is expected to be published in January 2009. For more information on this program see www.landstewardshipproject.org/pdf/factsheets/12_bfrdp_2008.pdf.

The programs mentioned above and the many others not mentioned are extremely important given the dire need for new farmers and the many obstacles prospective producers face. Participants in the youth sessions at the SWMN annual conference discussed the possibility of working together to support and inform their individual projects. The Southwest Marketing Network Steering Committee has identified youth and new farmer development as one of its priorities in the upcoming year. If you have an existing or potential project in this area and would be interested in networking around these issues, please contact Ilana Blankman at Farm to Table by calling 505-473-1004 x12 or through email at info@farmtotablenm.org.

Ilana Blankman, Farm to Table

Community Food Project assistance available

Thanks to funding from USDA Community Food Projects and Risk Management Agency Outreach, we will be able to provide assistance for community food projects this coming year. This assistance is aimed especially at the early stages of project development—such as setting goals, building partnerships, developing strategies—that will form a firm foundation for development of a strong and successful grant proposal.

See the “Community Food Projects” link on our website www.swmarketingnetwork.org for a variety of resources for developing a successful project and to request assistance.

Jim Dyer, Southwest Marketing Network

SWMN/CSU Organic Survey Project completed, resources on-line

A wealth of information about the certified organic producers in the Four Corners states—their current markets, challenges, opportunities, and hopes for the future—is now on-line at: <http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org>

Resulting from a joint project of Colorado State University and the SWMN, and funded by Western SARE, this project focused on surveying all the certified organic growers in our four states and on highlighting the opportunities for improving their marketing, especially locally and regionally.

The full report for downloading, the survey, full datasets, summary brochure, and PowerPoint presentation can be found on the website above. This web location, as well as this Newsletter, are the places to find out about upcoming organic workshops, meetings, and other events to explore the opportunities uncovered by this project.

Jim Dyer, Southwest Marketing Network

The new Southwest Marketing Network newsletter: Paper or E-version— it's your choice

We are working on ideas for offering the SWMN newsletter (yes, this one that you are holding) in its electronic version. We will probably never stop printing and mailing—BUT if you would rather receive a notice and a link to the current newsletter by email, feel free to tell us that now. Please email your request to ladams@cybermesa.com.

It will take a few more issues before we convert your address so please be patient.

Sales opportunities through La Montanita Food Co-op

Are you a mid-sized farmer, rancher or food producer? Are you interested in selling to grocery stores and institutions in New Mexico and Southern Colorado? Are you looking to expand your market but unable to transport your product? Then you may be interested in La Montanita's Cooperative Distribution Center.

La Montanita is a member-owned food cooperative that opened its first retail food store in Albuquerque in 1976. The natural and organic food grocer has expanded to four locations (two in Albuquerque, one in Santa Fe and one in Gallup). Because of the Co-op's commitment to building the local foodshed, in 2007 they opened the Cooperative Distribution Center (CDC) to provide storage, transportation and distribution services to local and regional farmers and food producers.

The CDC warehouse has approximately 9,000 square feet of storage area including refrigerated and frozen spaces. The CDC currently operates two semi-trucks that run routes throughout New Mexico and Southern Colorado. Some of the product that goes through the CDC gets sold in La Montanita's retail stores, but the

CDC also distributes local products to a number of other natural food stores (including Silver City Food Co-op and Whole Foods), restaurant chains (like Flying Star, an Albuquerque-based café with 14 locations) and institutions such as the University of New Mexico. The CDC has also helped to link producers with food processors who might be able to use their inputs.

As a business, La Montanita must charge producers for its storage, transportation and distribution services, but because of their strong commitment to helping producers, they seek to provide these services at the lowest cost possible. The CDC program is most able to serve mid-sized producers, in other words those able to supply in quantities and at prices suitable for food retail and/or institutional sales.

For more information on La Montanita and the CDC, see their website www.lamontanita.coop. If you are a mid-sized producer and interested in selling through the CDC, contact Michelle Franklin, CDC Manager, at (505) 217-2001 x110.

Good news for local foods in the Farm Bill

After many months of grueling deliberation and a veto override, the 2008 Farm Bill has become law, and with some good news for small-scale, minority and alternative farmers. For many years, the Farm Bill has largely dedicated the majority of the USDA's resources to providing subsidies and other support to large-scale commodity agriculture. While there is still plenty of this in the 2008 version, thanks to the hard work of local and national advocacy organizations throughout the country, there are a number of programs and policies in the new bill that benefit small-scale/alternative agriculture and underserved communities. To make sure that Southwest Marketing Network participants have full opportunity to take advantage of these beneficial provisions, this article will describe the programs and policies we think will be of most interest.

Programs that Support Agricultural Marketing and Production

Farmers' Market Promotion Program: Funding for this program was increased to \$33 million over five years which will go into one-year, competitively awarded grants of up to \$75,000 to promote farmers' markets. Five million dollars will be available in the next fiscal year.

Value-added Agricultural Market Development

Program: This program focuses on enhancing a farmer and rancher's share of the final retail food dollar by adding value through product differentiation and packaging, processing, marketing, and distribution innovations, including renewable energy. Funding for the program was actually cut. However, a priority was established for projects that focus on marketing and distribution of locally produced agricultural goods. Ten percent of this funding has been earmarked to go to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ten percent for small/mid-sized producers. Individual producers and producer cooperatives are eligible for this funding. Applications go through each state's Rural Development office.

Specialty Crop Block Grants: Funding for this program was increased to \$224 million over five years. Each state's Department of Agriculture receives a minimum of \$100,000 plus an additional amount according to its portion of specialty crop production. The Departments have discretion over how these funds are spent. Eligible uses include, but are not limited to, "buy local" and state product market campaigns,

as well as the promotion of single commodities, research, food safety, education, environmental concerns, cooperative formation and development, and improvement of distribution systems.

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development

Program: This new program provides \$75 million for grants to governmental and non-profit organizations that provide assistance to new and beginning farmers. Grants of up to \$250,000 can be used for activities such as helping new farmers acquire land, creating mentorship/apprentice programs, enterprise and financial training, and teaching basic livestock and crop production practices.

Programs that Benefit Food Businesses

Financing for Local Food Enterprises: gives priority to businesses, producers and non-profits involved in local food distribution and marketing for USDA-backed loans granted through the Rural Business and Industries Loan and Loan Guarantee program. These loan guarantees are only available for applicants in USDA-designated rural areas.

Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center: This new program provides \$3 million in grants to non-profit organizations to promote development of enterprises that distribute and market healthy and locally produced foods to underserved urban, rural, and tribal communities. It also establishes a center within the Cooperative State Education, Extension and Research Service to provide outreach, technical assistance, and feasibility study grants.

Rural Micro-enterprise Assistance Program: Another new program, this provides \$15 million over four years for non-profits and local and state governmental agencies to support the development of new small businesses in rural sectors. The funding can be used to provide rural entrepreneurs with micro-financing loans of up to \$50,000 and/or to provide training, support and market development assistance to rural micro-entrepreneurs.

Programs that Benefit Consumers

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program: Funding for this program was increased to \$20.6 million annually. The funding provides vouchers for low-income seniors to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets, CSAs, roadside stands, and other direct-marketing venues. *Farmers and ranchers, expect new customers!*

USDA “Food Desert” Study: provides at least \$500,000 in funding to the USDA Economic Research Service to study how many areas lack access to healthy and fresh food retail access and identify strategies to improve access.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations: This provision allows (but does not mandate) the creation of a “Traditionally and locally-grown food fund” where 50% of the food provided through the FDPIR program should be produced by Native Americans. *A great opportunity for Native American farmers!*

Community Food Projects: Funding for this program was maintained at \$5 million annually for ten years. Non-profit organizations may apply for this funding (*with a 100% match which means a “one to one” match. This can include in-kind, volunteer time, and other non-financial contributions.*) to develop innovative solutions to address local hunger, nutrition, and food access issues, often by connecting low-income people with fresh foods direct from farmers or community. *Remember, the SWMN can help your organization apply for this grant (see page 2). Pre-proposals are usually due in January, so start planning now!*

Programs that Benefit Children and Schools

Local Preference for School Food Purchases: A big victory for Farm to School advocates, this rule allows local schools to give preference to locally grown

foods when purchasing food for school meals with federal funds.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program: This program was expanded to all states to provide at least \$100,000 in funding for schools to provide additional fresh fruits and vegetables as a daily snack.

Programs that Benefit the Land

Organic Conversion, Technical, and Education Assistance: Allows producers to receive up to \$20,000 per year in payments and technical assistance for organic practices and practices related to the conversion to organic practices. The funding is made possible through the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP).

Farmland Protection Program: funding was increased to \$743 million over five years to provide matching funds for states to help purchase working farmland through conservation easements.

Remember, to make these new programs truly benefit our region’s producers and consumers, you must take advantage of the opportunities provided. The Southwest Marketing Network can provide technical assistance to you or your organization in figuring out which program might be beneficial to you. More information is available through www.swmarketingnetwork.org.

Thanks to the Northeast Midwest Institute for the information contained in this article.

Pam Roy, NM Food & Agriculture Policy Council

Save the Date! Next Year’s Spring Conference is Taking Form

It’s time to go back to Durango, Colorado again.

We will be based at the Doubletree Hotel there.

Remember that incredible spread they put on for us last time?

The dates are April 6, 7, and 8, 2009.

Put this in your calendar now.

Check the SWMN website conference page for the latest details as they develop:

www.swmarketingnetwork.org

The Alliance for a Carbon-Neutral Foodshed: Collaborating for widespread change

In November of last year, 100 mayors from cities across the country worked to develop a “Climate Protection Agreement.” The agreement, which has now been signed by over 700 mayors, including more than 30 from the Four Corners states, commits cities to working towards Kyoto protocol reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and to push state and federal lawmakers to meet or surpass these goals. The governors of both Arizona and New Mexico had already agreed to work towards these goals. Many of these lawmakers have since acknowledged the importance of local food systems, particularly those employing sustainable agricultural methods, in reducing greenhouse gases. Throughout the Southwest, a number of groups are using this recognition to advocate for policies and projects that will support local and regional sustainable agriculture.

Bruce Milne, Director of the Sustainability Studies Department at University of New Mexico was a member of the New Mexico Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change which found that a shift toward organic and local agriculture in the state could decrease carbon emissions by 11 million metric tons at a net zero cost over the long-term. Inspired by this finding and an avid gardener himself, Professor Milne has since been doing research on how to make food production in the area carbon-neutral.

To further this work and engage others, in spring 2007 Professor Milne collaborated with La Montanita Food Cooperative and the Mid-Region Council of Governments to form the Alliance for a Carbon-Neutral Foodshed. The three groups invited representatives from diverse organizations to participate in the Alliance including NMSU Cooperative Extension, Sandia National Labs, Farm to Table, and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, among others.

The mission of the group is to “Create a thriving New Mexico food supply chain while contributing to a balanced carbon budget. Through research, education, and hands-on activities we engage food producers, processors, distributors, consumers and policymakers to create social networks, innovative systems, and the supporting infrastructure.”

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To fulfill this mission, the Alliance is now working on two pilot projects, both very much in the planning stage. The first is a “Foodshed Summer Camp” which would seek to engage school-aged children in all activities related to sustainable food production including farming, cooking, nutrition, and renewable energy. This project will seek to increase awareness about food and agriculture issues and begin to train young people for careers in farming and food production.

The second project being investigated by the Alliance is the design of a mobile fruit and vegetable processing truck. The truck would serve the needs of the many small farmers that lack the infrastructure and/or labor necessary to process and store their produce for retail sales. The truck would also be capable of transporting the produce to central distribution areas. To make it carbon-neutral, the truck would be run on bio-diesel.

The Alliance is also conducting and collecting research on carbon footprinting for agriculture and food production. With local and state governments more and more interested in finding ways to decrease carbon emissions, the Alliance believes this research will be helpful in convincing policy-makers to invest in local food and agriculture systems that benefit producers, consumers and the planet.

For more information on the Alliance, contact Professor Bruce Milne at bmilne@sevilleta.unm.edu.

Ilana Blankman, Farm to Table

Farm to School news

In mid-August a diverse group of children's advocates convened in Santa Fe to develop a strategy for changing the public conversation about children and food. The meeting was organized by the WK Kellogg Foundation and included people from the Farm to School movement, Action for Healthy Kids, Prevention Institute, Food Research and Action Center, the CDC, National Governor's Association, Center for Science in the Public Interest, National Parent Teacher Association, Congressional Hunger Center, and a number of other representatives from national and regional foundations and organizations. We were charged to articulate the change that we want to see especially as it relates to the 2009 Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. This Act includes funding requirements for federal reimbursement for school meals throughout the country, for WIC programming (Women Infant and Children nutritionally at risk), and for childcare facilities, as well as associated subjects.

We broke into groups to dream big and to discuss how to craft a message that will be heard by all those who

need to hear it. We all discussed the change that we would like to see and it was quite clear from the follow-up reports to the gathering that there is much consensus from around the country. Here are just a few of the messages that we want all people to take up the charge with:

- Improvement is about the whole child and *nourishment* on many levels.
- Our work is about the connection between children, land, food, and place.
- Work toward producing and eating more local and culturally appropriate foods.
- Help all people have equal access to the highest quality foods.
- Better educated kids make better citizens and employees.
- Good nutrition is critical for a healthy child, and healthy children are critical to a healthy community.

Lē Adams, *Farm to Table*

Calendar of Events

October 4-8, 2008 • Community Food Security Coalition Conference: Restoring Our Urban & Rural Communities with Healthy Food. Held in Cherry Hills, NJ. For more information see www.foodsecurity.org

October 24 and 25, 2008 • NM Small Farm Conference • Moriarty Convention Center, NM. Contact Del Jimenez, NMSU Cooperative Extension, (505) 852-2668. Only \$10 per day!

October 25, 2008 • Southwest Fiber Festival • Amado, Arizona • Sponsored by the Southwest Fiber Arts Guild. The festival will include animal exhibits, fleece & fiber competitions, demonstrations, and numerous classes. The festival is currently seeking vendors, animal exhibitors and teachers. Visit the website for more information: www.southwestfiberfestival.com/index.php

November 10-11, 2008 • 11th Annual Fall Festival Alpaca Show 2007 • Loveland, CO Contact Allison Lynch, (303) 693-2772. The show will feature fleece and halter competitions.

November 17-19, 2008 • National Good Food Network Conference, sponsored by Winrock International. For more information, contact Farm to Table, (505) 473-1004.

November 18 and 19, 2008 • NM Beef Industry Strategic Planning Summit. • Albuquerque, NM. For more info contact nmbeef@nmbeef.com.

Go to www.swmarketingnetwork.org to find updated information on the Southwest Marketing Network and other activities in our region. For more events outside our region, visit the ATTRA calendar at www.attra.ncat.org/calendar/index.php

SOUTHWEST MARKETING NETWORK STEERING COMMITTEE

Jim Dyer, Project Director
Southwest Marketing Network
Hesperus, CO
970-588-2292
jadyer@frontier.net

Lē Adams
Farm to Table, NM
505-473-1004
ladams@cybermesa.com
www.farmtotablenm.org

John Blueyes
*Navajo Nation Department
of Agriculture, Window Rock, AZ*
928-871-6605
john_b_87421@yahoo.com

Clayton Brascoupe
*Traditional Native American
Farmers Association, NM*
505-983-2172
cbrascoupe@yahoo.com

Kate Clancy
Consultant
klclancy@comcast.net

Dennis Lamm
*Colorado State University
College of Agricultural Sciences*
970-491-2074
Dennis.Lamm@colostate.edu

Teresa Maurer
*National Center for
Appropriate Technology*
479-442-9824
teresam@ncat.org

Lydia Oberholtzer
Advisor
202-694-5486
loberholtzer@igc.org

Lynda Prim
The Farm Connection, NM
505-579-4386
lunalsfc@la-tierra.com

Pam Roy
Farm to Table, NM
505-473-1004
pamelaroy@aol.com
www.farmtotablenm.org

Russ Tronstad
*University of Arizona
Agricultural Resource Economics*
520-621-2425
tronstad@ag.arizona.edu

Evaluator

John Allen / James Goodwin
Western Rural Development Center
435-797-9732 / 435-797-7606
johna@ext.usu.edu

Newsletter Staff

Lē Adams, *Farm to Table*
Ilana Blankman, *Farm to Table*
Tawnya Laveta, *Farm to Table*
Pam Roy, *Farm to Table*



Farm to Table
3900 Paseo del Sol
Santa Fe, NM 87507

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