



Southwest Marketing Network

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

Promoting Local Agricultural Marketing in the Southwest

July 2009

What WE will do to build a good food system in the SW 2009 SWMN Conference recap

In early April, nearly 200 farmers, ranchers, agricultural service providers, food access groups, and policy advocates from 15 states met in Durango, CO for the 7th Annual Southwest Marketing Network Conference. This year’s theme, “Building a Good Food System in the Southwest” was introduced by a panel of “good food” experts from the Southwest and beyond who showed examples of how producers, processors, distributors, retailers, and communities can work together to bring more local, healthy, affordable, fair, and sustainably produced foods to more people. The importance of collaboration, trust, and accountability in achieving this good food system was emphasized throughout conference sessions amidst discussions of livestock marketing, business management, organizational development, scaling up, beginning farmers, policy and much more. The conference concluded with a plenary discussion in which all participants were asked what commitment they would take to build the good food system in their community.

Participants responded with gusto:

Work with other producers to aggregate product and sell to larger markets. • Develop new farmers’ markets. • Teach young people about agriculture (and learn from them!). • Research and educate consumers. • Build value chains for culturally significant and traditional foods. • Develop livestock processing capacity. • Obtain capital to expand our farm. • Think of other producers as potential partners, not competitors. • Work with public health groups to show the health benefits of local and traditional foods. • Sell to schools, hospitals, prisons, restaurants, over the internet, to our next door neighbor. • Network among community gardens. • Work with distributors to get our food to more people. • Get our seconds to food banks. • Develop a Navajo Nation Food and Agriculture Network.

The Steering Committee also asked participants what the Southwest Marketing Network could do to help them fulfill these commitments. You asked for many great things, some of which we can respond to now, some of which we are working on, and others of which we will work towards in the future. Below is a summary of the most common requests and a brief explanation of how close we are to meeting those needs.

More frequent, smaller gatherings—the SWMN recently submitted a grant proposal that would help to fund statewide gatherings and specific gatherings on farm to school and policy. If you have a particular gathering you’d like to host, the SWMN may be able to help.

A Directory of Expertise—we’ve got one on the SWMN website. From the homepage, just click on Directory of Expertise. And, we think everybody’s an expert, so please let Julie Hudak know if you’d like to be listed in the directory. Email her at juliehudak@gmail.com. If you don’t have internet access, we will get you a hard copy. Call 505-473-1004.

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More website resources—we're adding new information and resources to our website regularly. The newsletter will be highlighting a different web resource each quarter. We will work on adding your specific requests.

More non-web resources—that's one we'll have to work on. If you know of a very useful hardcopy resource we should know about, please let us know. Contact Jim Dyer at jadye@frontier.net.

Grant-writing assistance—we've got it. Please see the article in this newsletter for more details.

Policy—SWMN partners can provide technical assistance to help in developing policy councils. New communication systems are being developed to help us share more information on state and federal policy issues. More details on this soon.

Navajo Nation Outreach—the SWMN Steering Committee just submitted a proposal that would allow us to hire a part-time coordinator for the Navajo Nation. This person would help to host trainings and convenings on the Nation, develop a Navajo Network,

provide outreach for trainings sponsored by the SWMN and tribal extension, and help producers and community groups access information and resources. If we do not receive funding through this proposal, we will continue to seek other sources to fund these activities.

Success Stories—we often feature success stories in our newsletter and at conferences. We also have a database of them on our website. If you have a success story you'd like to share, please email it to juliehudak@gmail.com.

Value Chains—SWMN partners are eager to provide additional training and technical assistance on value chains. If you have questions, would like to provide training in value chain methodology, or would like some hands on help, please contact Ilana Blankman from Farm to Table at pixii51@gmail.com.

Thanks to all of you who shared your commitments and your suggestions for the SWMN. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with all of you to build a good food system in the Southwest.

Ilana Blankman, Farm to Table

Community support for local farmers and ranchers

So often, just when the interest in locally produced food starts ramping up in a community, a stark realization threatens to call it all to a halt—there just isn't enough local food to meet the growing demand—not enough farmers and ranchers growing for local markets. No wonder beginning and growing farmer programs are sprouting up across the region.

One great way to support new local production—by new farmers and ranchers, by those switching from raising commodities to local products, or by those scaling up to meet greater market demand—is a training in the basics of farm business planning and development. As elsewhere, Colorado State University Extension is offering these very popular courses in communities across Colorado (see *Darrin Parmenter's article, "CSU Growing Farmer Programs" on p.3*). These courses can be an integral part of a community's efforts to support local producers.

In Southwest Colorado, we have started a "Beginning Farmer Program," which complements the La Plata County Extension training course, to explore how our community can support our farmers and ranchers. The focus of the community effort is especially on those

willing and able to grow products for local markets since there are so many incentives for a community to support them: preserving agricultural lands, keeping money circulating in the local economy, reducing energy use/pollution/greenhouse gases, greater assurance of food safety, providing fresher products, and more.

Community members have two distinct venues for supporting local producers. First is in the marketplace. As a consumer, all community members can support producers whose products embody the values they share. They can be loyal dependable customers—taking a little more time to find the producer, paying a fair price, referring them to friends and neighbors.

Everyone can help local producers with supportive policies as well. All of us are policymakers—some as elected officials, some as activists, and all as voters. Land use, health, and business regulations can either support or hinder local production and marketing. Land can be made readily available in innovative ways or remain out of reach of aspiring farmers. Lenders can take the time to listen to alternative business plans, or hide behind conventional lending practices.

In Southwest Colorado, we have begun a fruitful discussion of all the ways we can help—in terms of policies and markets. On our website: www.sustainableswcolorado.org we have:

- A simple “Land Link” bulletin board listing of available land and willing growers.
- A list of resources and community models for those who want to support local producers.

- A link for the CSU Extension “Growing Farmers” training course.
- An invitation to join in this community-wide effort.

Chances are, your community could use more food from local farmers and ranchers. What they often need most is your support—marketwise and policywise.

Jim Dyer, Southwest Marketing Network and Healthy Community Food Systems

CSU Growing Farmer Programs: Building the next generation of farmers

Recently, counties throughout Colorado have seen a significant increase in the number of potential growers interested in becoming full-time production operations. As the calls continued to come into the Colorado State University (CSU) Extension offices throughout the state, counties such as Boulder and La Plata realized the need to educate and help new producers explore farming as a business, as well as providing farmers with tools and ideas to refine and enhance their business management, production, and marketing skills.

Boulder County piloted the program in 2007 and was able to share lessons learned from their first two Building Farmers programs with La Plata County. Boulder County also shared materials with La Plata County that had already been developed for their course, which helped shape the direction of the new program in SW Colorado.

The overarching idea of CSU’s Building Farmers Program is to provide education, business planning skills, mentorship, and overall capacity building for small to mid-sized farmers planning to begin production, early in their operational development, and/or for those who are established but considering changes to their operation. If we can give these farmers a stronger stool to sit on, then our belief is that the local food economy, the retention of land in agriculture, and the ability for them to succeed will all benefit.

From an educational standpoint, an additional goal of the Building Farmers Programs was to develop a mixture of local, regional, and statewide experts combined with local farmers and producers to teach the classes. Our ability to utilize local farmers and producers as educators is a key component to the success of the program. It allowed the students to associate the issues discussed in class with real-life scenarios.

At the beginning of the class we allotted one hour for dinner, allowing students to interact, network, and share experiences with other classmates—another important component to the learning process. In La Plata County we were fortunate to have each dinner prepared by chefs that were dedicated to the local food movement. Consequently, almost every meal had at least one locally sourced ingredient.

Lastly, we incorporated a separate student-driven homework track. Throughout the class, the students gained the knowledge to develop a business plan for their operation. We did not expect this to be an overnight process, but rather a culmination of ideas learned throughout the program. The last two classes were designated for presentations from the students of their individual business plans.

The Building and Growing Farmers Programs in Boulder and La Plata County have been a tremendous success. Between the two locations we have had 92 students take the class over the last two years. Results from all three classes indicate that 100% of the participants would recommend it to others and, 80-90% subsequently intended to create and/or edit a business plan. These exciting results, especially in areas where large-scale agriculture acreage has diminished, land costs can be exorbitant, and markets can be limited (population in La Plata County is approximately 50,000) continue to justify the importance of this class.

CSU Extension feels that this is a timely program as interests in local food increase in many areas of Colorado. Our impacts will continue to be profound as the program grows into its 3rd year and expands throughout the state.

Darrin Parmenter, Colorado State University Extension

New! SWMN NewsBriefs

Look for **SWMN NewsBriefs** on our website at the beginning of each month for the latest announcements including:

- Plans for our next SWMN Conference.
- Special SWMN meetings, trainings, and workshops.
- Availability of on-line issues of SWMN newsletter.
- Other critical news.

Electronic SWMN newsletters

We have already offered e-versions of our SWMN newsletter whereby you would get an e-mail that the latest newsletter has been posted on-line for reading, and printing if you wish—contact Lē Adams at ladams@cybermesa.com for that option. To save precious paper and other resources, we may not always send each issue out as a hardcopy, so:

- Check the monthly SWMN NewsBriefs (above) to hear about on-line-only versions, or sign up with Lē Adams for the e-mail notice as described above.
- If you need a hardcopy due to internet access issues, please contact Lē Adams at ladams@cybermesa.com or 505-473-1004.

2009 SWMN Conference in Durango, CO

Conference participants listen to the closing remarks on the final day of the SWMN conference



Conference participants express what they can do to create Good Food Networks back home when they return from the SWMN conference.



SWMN Conference Farm Tours: Turtle Lake Refuge, Shared Harvest Community Garden, and James Ranch



photo by Julie Hudak

Marye Jackson, former garden coordinator of the Shared Harvest Community Garden, leads conference participants on a tour of the uniquely structured community garden.



photo by Julie Hudak

Katrina Blair of Turtle Lake Refuge shows farm tour participants the indoor grow room where they grow greens for Durango area restaurants and schools.



photo by Julie Hudak

Dave James of James Ranch speaks to farm tour participants during a hay ride along the Animas River.



photo by Julie Hudak

Jennifer Wheeling, farmer of the Gardens at James Ranch, speaks to farm tour participants about the James Ranch multi-generational farming and ranching operation

Grant writing tips: How to make sure your proposal is funded

At the 2009 SWMN Conference in Durango, the grant writing workshops were packed with folks eager to learn how to best access funding. Since the conference we have updated our website with all the grant writing materials from the conference. Please check it out at <http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org/index.php/grant-writing-resources>. There you will find a list of possible funders, tips and a checklist for a successful application, a whole section on USDA Community Food Projects, and more!

Here's an expanded version of the Tip Sheet you will find on the SWMN website:

Success vs. Rejection: tips on getting your proposal funded

- 1. Involve your clients, community, officials, and partners in developing ideas for the project.** Doing things “to” people and “for” people does not lead to effective change. Instead you want to do things “with” people, to empower and involve them in making things better.
- 2. Carefully choose where you want to apply for funding.** Be *positive* that your project fits well with the funder's funding goals, priorities, and values. Read their website, print out their guidelines and underline all the important parts. Call them with your project idea and ask them if it is a good fit before you write anything. Use their words to describe your project and activities. For example if their priority is “to fund collaborative community efforts”, then describe your project as “a collaborative community effort”.
- 3. Personalize your project.** Write from the point of view of the community. Tell your story in a positive, dynamic, and persuasive manner. Write your application so that anyone can understand your project and everyone will get excited by it. Avoid jargon or initials.
- 4. Grantors don't fund problems, they fund SOLUTIONS.** Identify the issues, but don't make them the focal point of your proposal. Discuss “challenges” rather than “barriers” or “problems”. Focus on what you propose to do to *overcome* these challenges.
- 5. Assume that the reviewers do not have a clue as to where you are, or what you are doing.** Explain it to them in clear, succinct language. Help them interpret statistics, describe circumstances for them, put in maps, diagrams, and pictures. Have someone read it

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who is NOT familiar with your program and ask them if it is clearly explained and interesting to them.

- 6. Writing by committee can result in a disjointed application.** One person needs to take responsibility for giving form and coherence to the final product, checking spelling and grammar, etc. Establish reasonable, but *firm* timelines for gathering all of the pieces and check to make sure that everyone involved is getting their part done on time.
- 7. Only submit applications for projects that you are going to do anyway!** Don't start a whole new project just because there is a grant application out there. Stick to your mission and the activities that you are already doing well. For every project, ask yourself if it clearly falls within your *existing* mission and goals.
- 8. Linkages, partnerships, collaborations, and leveraging are extremely important to funders.** Funders want to see that you are cooperating and collaborating with other community groups. They also want to see that they are not the only ones funding you. Show them how many volunteers you have and how many hours they work. Explain what kinds of, and how much, community support you have.
- 9. Even if a particular application does not get funded, don't get discouraged.** Learn from the process and use these ideas to move forward. Always request reviewer comments. It often takes 5 or 6 applications to get your first funding. With every successful grant, your chances of getting another increases. You will have to spend less time writing the next grant because you already have all the pieces in place. Tailor every grant application to the funder; don't just keep sending out a generic grant.
- 10. Write a ½ to 1 page COVER LETTER to go with each application.** In the letter, thank the funder for

the opportunity to apply and for the great work they do in the community. In one paragraph, identify the dollar amount you are asking, summarize your program and explain why it so important in your community.

- 11. Finally, *do not miss the deadline.*** Be sure to find out if the deadline is a postmark deadline or a receipt in the office deadline. Find out the delivery options: mail, email, via a web site, fax, or hand delivery. Some delivery companies do not offer next-day service in rural areas. Know the difference between the mailing address and the delivery address. If the deadline is 5:00 p.m. and the application arrives at 5:01 p.m., it will not be accepted! If submitting through an online system, do a trial run *long before the deadline.* Do NOT wait until the last minute to press the submit button as it may not go through and the application will not be accepted. Allow time for problems and glitches.
- 12. One last suggestion—save your work on your computer often and back up everything!** Make hard copies of everything. Keep a complete copy of the original application and the date you submitted it. The person in your organization who writes the application may not be the one that later implements the project or who has to reapply the next year.

Jenny Wrenn, Healthy Community Food Systems

SWMN web resources to help beginner & growing farmers

The Southwest Marketing Network has several web resources to help farmers grow their businesses. Please visit the website and let us know if you find the following resource sections helpful:

Marketing Topics

The Marketing Topics Resource Section has over 35 resource pages to help farmers with marketing. The resource pages range from Organic Marketing to tips on selling to restaurants, school districts, and institutions. Please visit: <http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org/index.php/marketing-topics>

Grant Writing Resources

The SWMN website Grant Writing Resources include tips on how to make sure your grant proposal is funded, links to foundations that fund agricultural projects, and a grant application checklist. Please visit: <http://www.swmarketingnetwork.org/index.php/grant-writing-resources>

Calendar of Events

August 30, 2009 • “Colorado Dueling Cooks Challenge” at the Colorado State Fair • Pueblo, CO
For more information, contact Wendy White at (303) 239-4119

September 25-26, 2009 • 4th Annual Symposium for Sustainable Food & Seed Sovereignty • Santa Fe, NM
For more info: <http://www.foodandseedconference.info/>

October 9-12, 2009 • From Commodity to Community: Food Politics and Projects in the Heartland: 13th Annual Community Food Security Coalition Conference • Des Moines, IA
For more information call (503) 954-2970 or visit <http://www.communityfoodconference.org/>

October 16-18, 2009 • Bioneers Conference • San Rafael, CA
For more information call 1-877-BIONEERS or visit <http://bioneers.org/conference/program>

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

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