



# Southwest Marketing Network

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

Promoting Local Agricultural Marketing in the Southwest

Fall 2010

### Building sustainable community food systems in the Four Corners

*Directors Note: In this issue, we are bringing you news of some exciting projects involving Tribal communities across the Southwest. From a national teen cooking success on the Tohono O’odham Nation to raising livestock sustainably on the Navajo Nation, excellent projects are emerging which bode well for our region as a whole.*

We are pleased to announce that Healthy Community Food Systems, as a partner of the Southwest Marketing Network, received a food systems grant from the Christensen Fund this spring. This grant is designed to help tribal communities in the broader Four Corners region develop healthy community-based food systems ensuring healthy land, healthy food, and healthy people over the long term.

Beneath the surface of the local food movement is an increasing and heartening interest in bringing a number of distinct fundamental sustainability values into our local food systems—from field to table. This project will help communities explore the great variety of values that can be incorporated in their food systems, such as nutritional quality, climate friendliness, access and food security, seasonal eating, culturally appropriate foods, traditional production and genetics, wildlife relationships, organic methods, local production, economic development, and others.

A community need not focus on all these values at once to develop the essential elements of a sustainable food system such as efficient use of resources, fairness, diversity in products and markets, and broad community participation. However, a recognition of all these values—the big picture, is essential in planning effective food system development. This process will allow communities to strategically pursue those values most suited to their needs and situation and thereby develop greater “ownership” of the process and the resulting food system.

A focus on sustainability values can capitalize on what the individuals in a community are passionate about and which can be the basis for engagement and ownership —“seeing oneself as part of the food system.”

The pursuit of sustainability requires a broad view of the system and its parts, of the assumptions we use to understand it, interactions, feedbacks, and synergies. It also requires a long view, looking at implications and creating planning visions beyond the usual 5-20 year timeframes. Ultimately, this project should help us learn from each other as we explore how best to pursue these wider dimensions of sustainability for our local food systems and our communities as a whole.

Currently, we are developing draft materials to help communities plan and implement improvements to their local food systems. We are gathering insights and resources from projects in tribal and non-tribal communities across the country and will be working with tribal contacts in our region to incorporate essential Native perspectives and make sure the resources are suitable for use in tribal communities here in the Southwest. If you would like to participate—either to suggest approaches or to learn more about this resource—do let us know at [jadyer@frontier.net](mailto:jadyer@frontier.net)

*Jim Dyer, Southwest Marketing Network*

#### More inside:

Cultivando tradición . . . . .	2
8th Annual SWMN Conference . . . . .	3
Livestock improvement on the Navajo Nation . . . .	4
Changing school lunches . . . . .	6
Teens capture cooking competition . . . . .	7

# Cultivando tradición

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Summer in southern New Mexico is hot, and this summer it was also a hotbed for food system activity. This summer, Doña Ana County's four farmers' markets (Las Cruces, Las Cruces Mountain View, Chaparral, and Sunland Park) along with the Las Cruces Healthy Kids project of the NM Department of Health have banded together to form the Southern New Mexico Farmers' Market Group. The purpose of the group is to develop solutions to common concerns, and so far, their biggest concern is attracting more vendors. The vendors that do come to market are selling out early and leaving customers who come later empty handed. The group plans to investigate whether there are more farmers out there that could be vendors, but currently do not sell at markets. They would like to extend an invitation to all growers in the area to participate in the market. Contact information for the market managers can be found at [www.farmersmarketsnm.org](http://www.farmersmarketsnm.org) by clicking on "Market Locations."

While the group is hopeful that there are producers waiting in the wings to take advantage of both a lucrative marketing outlet and a great opportunity to help their community access the healthiest, freshest food around, they are also setting their sights on "growing" new farmers. That's where the Colonias Development Council's *Cultivando Tradición* program comes in. The aim of the program is to work with community members to create culturally-appropriate, educational, and healthy community garden spaces. Instrumental to this work has been a group of youth from El Vado, Chaparral and Anthony, three small "colonias" (see sidebar).

Over the past three years, the CDC has hired these youth through a Youth Conservation Corps grant to build greenhouses and community gardens. The youth have built skills in farming and awareness in the community about how gratifying it is to grow and eat healthy food. This summer, the youth continued work in the gardens, but they also took on a very different project.

As part of their efforts to link food production with social, environmental, and economic justice issues, 20 youth have been working since February on a community food assessment. The youth, with help from anthropology professor Dr. Lois Sanford of New Mexico State University, developed a series of questions designed to draw out how the community accesses food and whether they felt the food they had access to was

**The aim of the program is to work with community members to create culturally-appropriate, educational, and healthy community garden spaces.**

healthy and affordable. The youth then asked these questions of 222 residents of El Vado, Chaparral and Anthony, and compiled the answers.

Much of what they found was surprising to them, and piqued questions that they plan to get further answers to through focus groups and community action planning activities. They were excited to find that nearly a third of the people they surveyed were growing some of their own produce in backyard gardens.

The CDC will be publishing a final report from the food assessment on their website [www.colonias.org](http://www.colonias.org) and will be posting a video on youtube documenting the process. The CDC has already developed an excellent resource called *Cultivando Tradición: A Community Garden Resource Manual for Southern New Mexico* that provides guidance on how to develop a community garden and connect it to larger food system development issues.

While the staff of the CDC know that the youth involved in the program have many hopes and dreams for their futures, they hope that this work will plant the seeds of future farmers and know that it will cultivate in all of the youth a stronger connection to their food system.

*Ilana Blankman, Farm to Table*

## What is a 'colonia'?

The word 'colonia' means neighborhood in Spanish. However, in Texas, Arizona and New Mexico, colonia refers to the rural, unincorporated settlements along the U.S.-Mexico border characterized by inadequate infrastructure. Colonias are small communities where families are striving to improve the quality of life for themselves and those around them.

(from the website of the Colonias Development Council)

## 8th Annual SWMN Conference “Increased profitability through new ag markets”

SWMN held its annual small producer’s marketing conference for the first time in Utah on June 30th this year. The 8th annual gathering was held at the Thanksgiving Point conference center in Lehi, UT, about thirty minutes south of Salt Lake City. The day-long conference emphasis was on farm to institution marketing and selling. Many smaller and midsized farmers and ranchers are seeking a greater understanding about the opportunities and challenges of gearing up their operations so that they can profitably access larger institutional markets such as schools and restaurants.

Speakers from Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico offered guidance to attendees on farm to institution selling by presenting interactive sessions on a wide range of topics. The segments were designed to help farmers and ranchers better understand what they have to do to expand into this next level of marketing as well as learn what institutions need farmers and ranchers to do to properly prepare their products for entry into institution kitchens, and why.

The opening session explored what the rapidly expanding Farm to School national movement is all about and why it is often a very good place to learn about institutional requirements for buying locally produced food. Representatives from Utah’s newly established Farm to School organization laid out their plans and invited Utah attendees to join. The other morning sessions covered institutional marketing relationships and challenges and an extended discussion on food safety requirements and policy changes needed to better support beneficial farm policy, especially for smaller producers. One young farmer told us that, “As a prospective organic farmer, everything I learned was applicable.”

The afternoon session was structured to give attendees the opportunity to meet with representatives from the USDA Rural Development, the Farm Service Agency,

Western Ag Credit, and others to learn firsthand what grant and loan programs were available and how best to start the process to apply. The time period was divided into three segments so attendees could spend time with each group, if they so chose. The final session outlined the innovative urban farming program that Salt Lake County (UT) has recently initiated which allows farmers to lease county land for farming that would otherwise sit fallow. It clearly is a win-win situation for producers and the county that ought to be replicated in most counties in the west.

A producer, who has attended several SWMN annual conferences, told us that, “The SWMN always brings together a wealth of talent and contacts.” We agree. The attendees seemed pleased with what the conference offered them as they gave the conference a 4.6 rating out of a possible 5.0. One of our producers said it best, *“So much info! Gave me lots to think about and ideas to improve my production.”*

Our sponsoring organizations included: USDA Risk Management, the Western Rural Development Center, Farm to Table, the National Center for Appropriate Technology, Healthy Community Food Systems, USDA Rural Development, Farm Service Agency, Western Ag Credit, Community Food Security Coalition, Utah State University Cooperative Extension, National Farm to School Network, Utah Farm to School, Utah Slow Food, USDA Resource Conservation & Development Agency and Salt Lake County’s Urban Farming Initiative.

Next up for our annual conferences will be another exciting first . . . the 9th annual SWMN conference in Indian country on the Navajo Nation. See you there!

*Jim Goodwin, Western Rural Development Center*

**Go to [www.swmarketingnetwork.org](http://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](http://www.attra.ncat.org/calendar/index.php)**

# Livestock improvement on the Navajo Nation: Looking into the future

## Part one: Rancher profile—Anthony Howard

If you've ever been to Crownpoint, New Mexico located in the eastern, "checkerboard" region of the Navajo Nation you know that its high desert beauty is archetypal: high mesas, red rocks and juniper brush. You may also know that it has a very long history of agriculture, initiated by the Anasazi and later the Diné people who continue to work the land today. But what you probably don't know is that, with the help of a Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (WSARE) grant, a group of ranchers in the Crownpoint chapter have come together to regenerate the area's ranch lands and to create the conditions in which Navajo ranchers can sustain themselves with the cattle that graze on it. (Read on to part two of this article which will provide more information about the WSARE grant application process).

The project, entitled "Eastern Navajo Cattle Herd Improvement Initiative," was conceived by Anthony Howard, Director of the Navajo Technical College Extension Service. Anthony is a man who knows cattle from all angles—scientific, economic, and spiritual—and from this knowledge springs a deep enthusiasm for innovation in caring for the land, the animals, and the community. He says, "I guess I'm sort of a success story, coming from a rural community and going away to get educated. Then it becomes your responsibility to come back home and help your people with what you've learned."

Anthony was born in Y'ahtahey and almost as soon as he could write his name, he was responsible for taking care of his grandmother's sheep. As he got older, he also took charge of her cattle and soon started a small herd of his own. In 1990, Anthony and his father got a lease on tribal ranch lands and were able to expand their business. Around the same time, Anthony was recruited to become a star roper on Diné College's rodeo team, where he obtained an Associates degree in Animal Science. He then went back home to Navajo Technical College and obtained a vet tech certification. Finally, through pressure from the veterinarian he worked for, Anthony took the big trip down south and obtained a Bachelors in Animal Science in 2000. When he returned, he started to implement the practices he had learned at school on his own ranch, and ten years later, the quality of his herd is testament to his success. In 2002, Anthony started working for Navajo Technical College to share his learnings with other ranchers in the community.

Over his time as a cattle rancher, Anthony has been concerned with the negative perceptions cattle buyers have of calves raised by Navajo ranchers. What Anthony calls the "Bar N (for Navajo) brand", results in lower prices paid to him and his neighbors because of their tribal background. He recognizes, however that these perceptions haven't come out of nowhere, but rather stem from both the challenging geography and forage conditions ranchers in his area face as well as the fact that currently most Navajo ranchers raise cattle primarily for domestic consumption or to share with friends and families and sell cattle only as a small supplement to their income, which discourages them from investing much time or money into breed improvement.

However, Anthony and the other Initiative participants are themselves members of a new "breed" of ranchers on the Navajo Nation who want to see these perceptions reversed as a part of a strategy that will enable their ranch businesses to generate more or all of the income they need to support their families. While this will be a long-term process, Anthony has identified three key areas of work that will help to generate momentum in this direction: range management, breed improvement, and collective marketing. The WSARE grant has provided him and the others in his group with the resources to take important steps in each of these areas.

### Range Management:

Many of the ranchers who are participating in the project are already using sustainable range management practices, including several who have successfully implemented Natural Resource Conservation Service EQIP contracts (see sidebar for information on the EQIP program). However, in order to further revitalize their land, it needs some time to rest. Therefore, included in the grant was funding to help send a portion of each rancher's herd to the Valles Caldera grass bank in the Jemez mountains, through a program developed by New Mexico State University. By the time you read this article, the cows will have returned fat and happy from their vacation to the east.

### Breed Improvement:

With a degree in Animal Science from New Mexico State University (NMSU), Anthony has an excellent understanding of how selective breeding can drastically improve cattle performance, particularly in challenging environments like the high desert. For a number of years, Anthony has been breeding more and more Hereford



into his herd and particularly those animals that have performed well in his are resulting in healthy and heavy calves that earn him more per pound at auction.

The WSARE grant will help other ranchers in the group extend this breed improvement. First, calves from each herd to be tested at NMSU's Clayton Animal Research Center to establish a baseline on weight gain, yield grade, and carcass quality from which producers can gauge the success of their herd improvement. Second, six heifers from each herd that appear to be best-suited the Crownpoint-area climate/geography will be sent in January 2011 to the NMSU Agricultural Science Center in Tucumcari to have genetic testing and be artificially inseminated with semen from bulls whose genetic qualities best complement the heifers' genetics. Resulting calves will be monitored for their adaptation to the environment, weight gain, and market quality. Finally, NMSU Livestock Specialist Manny Encinias will help the participating producers to interpret the results of these tests and use them to develop a plan for herd improvement.

### Collective Marketing

Part of the impetus behind the breed improvement activities is also beginning to develop a more homogenous herd. This will allow the producers to market their calves collectively. Cattle buyers will pay higher prices for larger "lots" of similar cattle. Several Crownpoint ranchers have already put their cattle together to take to the auction in Belen, NM, with strong results.

Collective marketing also decreases transport costs—working together ranchers can ensure that each trailer is full, maximizing efficiency. In order to develop a more unified herd, grant funds will be used to do trich and semen testing on bulls owned by individual ranchers to ensure that it is safe for the ranchers to exchange bulls. Producers will also receive training from Dr. Encinias on how to assemble a marketing "package" to take to auction.

Those involved in the project feel strongly that these efforts in the realms of range and herd improvement and collective marketing will make a big impact not only in their own ranch businesses, but also on the general perception of Navajo cattle. Further, as Anthony says, nothing makes a rancher want to try a new practice



J Moorman

Eastern Navajo ranchers at the Valles Caldera

than seeing his/her neighbor start to make money off of that practice. He has strong hopes that he and the group can lead by example, helping to raise the overall quality of the land, herd, and earning capacity of his community and the rest of the Navajo Nation.

### Part two: Finding resources for your ideas

While the Eastern Navajo group would be leaders and innovators with or without the WSARE grant, the resources provided through the program will allow them to jumpstart the process. And because we imagine that many of you reading this article are also innovators, we'd like to provide some background on how you might be able to use Western SARE and other federal funding programs to turn your innovative ideas into a reality.

*continued on page 6*

### The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This is a voluntary program of the Natural Resource Conservation Service that covers a portion (up to 75%) of the costs of projects on eligible farm and rangeland that help to protect natural resources. Eligible project areas include: manure management, pest management, irrigation upgrades, erosion control, range and pasture planting, fencing and stockwater, and many others.

See <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip> for more information or call your local NRCS agent.

The grant that Anthony and his group received is called a “Producer Research and Education Grant.” This grant is unusual among federal funding programs in that producers can apply for the grant directly. Individual producers can apply for up to \$15,000 and groups of two or more producers can request as much as \$30,000 for a one or two-year project.

The purpose behind the grant is to provide producers with some resources to try out new sustainable practices, whether in production or in marketing, that could benefit their businesses, the environment, and the community in which they live. In the case of Anthony’s grant, the practices they are testing are those described above in range improvement, herd improvement and collective marketing. You can imagine that lots of different kinds of projects are possible, from trying new seed varieties to experimenting with renewable energy, to developing a new way of marketing. The national SARE website has descriptions of all the projects undertaken through the grant so far to help give you an idea of possible projects.

Besides the research, as the title says, education is an essential component of this program. Grantees to share what they’ve learned with other producers through on-farm workshops, educational material, and/or more informal “across the fence” sharing. For this reason, Anthony’s project includes workshops to bring in other community members to learn about what they are doing as well as development of an audiovisual tool documenting their project.

The potential to do really great projects through this grant should be evident, but you may be asking, as a producer with too much to do already, do I have time? Well, the WSARE grant application process is much simpler than a lot of other federal grants. The application is only five pages of writing, all divided up for you into small, manageable chunks, and you don’t have to be an accountant to fill out the forms or develop the budget. And, while the proposal is not long, the window for submitting them is—this year’s stretches from April 1st to December 3rd, so you can work on it during a time that works for you. To get the grant application and more information about Western SARE grants go to <https://wsare.usu.edu/grants/>.

And, help is available! While Anthony knew exactly what he wanted to do, he was having trouble putting it into words. So he called me, a staff person at Farm to Table (who, as you can see has no problem with putting

lots of words on paper). Through a grant our organization received from the USDA Office of Outreach, we have the capacity to help underserved producers access USDA programs like WSARE. So, if you have an idea for something you’d like to accomplish on your farm/ranch or in your rural community, please be in touch, and we can work together to make it happen.

*Ilana Blankman, Farm to Table*

Grant-writing technical assistance available  
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or 505-473-1004 x 12.

## Changing school lunches: one community at a time

A local team was among hundreds of high school culinary programs and cooking clubs around the United States to submit entries to a prestigious contest. Part of the Healthy Schools Campaign and the National Farm to School Network, the “Cooking for Change” Competition lets students contribute to an important national dialogue about local foods and school nutrition. Teams of high school and college students are challenged to create a healthy, great-tasting school meal that meets high nutrition standards, incorporates a local food item, draws from ingredients commonly available to food service, and can be easily prepared in a school kitchen.

The TOCA Cooking Club was formed to nurture High School students and youth interested in the culinary field. Members of the cooking club participate in TOCA’s Young O’odham United Through Health (Y.O.U.T.H.) activities, including the recent O’odham Foods school lunch debut at Baboquivari High School.

Whether or not they win the national competition, teammates seek the ultimate recognition of having their meal put on the cafeteria menu at Baboquivari High School: “We could have our own recipes used in the schools. It’s really exciting.”

Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA) is a community-based organization dedicated to creating a healthy, sustainable and culturally-vital community on the Tohono O’odham Nation.

*Karen Blaine, TOCA and Le Adams, Farm to Table*

*story continues on page 7*

## Teens capture “Cooking Up Change” competition

Three teens combined ingredients from their Native American nation with USDA commodity foods to come up with the winning entry in this year’s Cooking Up Change national competition on May 18, 2010. The trio, Yvette Ventura, Zade Arnold and Ross Miguel, all members of the Tohono O’odham Nation in Southwest Arizona, cooked up quesadillas, salad and fruit dip. While the combination sounds like average school lunch fare, the teens’ unique Native American ingredients and execution made the meal a winner.

The trio joined four other teams of finalists in a timed culinary showdown presented by the Chicago-based Healthy Schools Campaign on the eve of the fifth annual “Taking Root, Farm-to-Cafeteria Conference”, held in Detroit this year. Tohono O’odham teens filled their quesadillas with slow-cooked tepary beans, chopped chicken, fresh spinach, salsa and shredded mozzarella, all wrapped in handmade whole-wheat tortillas. On the side, they served spinach salad with pears and apples in a confetti-carrot vinaigrette dressing. For dessert the teens whipped up a yogurt, peanut butter and cinnamon dip with apple slices.

The teens hail from the Tohono O’odham Nation, a community of about 28,000 residents living on land covering much of southern Arizona. On the weekend prior to the finals, grandmothers and aunts from the tribe helped the teens prepare whole wheat tortillas from scratch, stretching and cooking the tortillas on a comal over a mesquite fire. The team left Arizona with 36 tortillas, six pounds of dried tepary beans and their brand new chef’s uniforms and headed to Detroit.

Teams had three hours to prep, cook and serve. Yvette headed straight for the dutch ovens to start the beans. Zade cleaned and cut the spinach, apples, pears and carrots. Ross prepped the mise-en-place and the chicken. It got pretty hot in the kitchen, with five teams working shoulder-to-shoulder. Together, the three of them cranked out 40 sample plates and two judges’ dishes.

“I’m biting into this quesadilla and there was something that exploded on my palate. A bean with a rich, deep taste. It was amazing,” said Tony Geraci, one of the contest judges and the Food & Nutrition Director for Baltimore Public Schools, referring to the brown Sonoran Desert-based tepary bean. Amazing too, he said, was that the teenaged-trio worked under constraints similar to the ones he faces as a school food service director: a limited ingredient list, a budget of

about a buck or so per meal and no more than six steps of prep per ingredient.

“We brainstormed on the different things we like, and we went from there,” said Ross, a high school senior and youth volunteer at the Tohono O’odham Community Action Center. Mary Paganelli, their mentor and chef at the Desert Rain Café encouraged the teens to stick with ingredients native to their land. They tweaked and tweaked the recipes, adding and subtracting ingredients, until they got what they hoped was a winning combination. Every couple of weeks they invited folks to the community center to try a new incarnation of the dishes.



*Cooking Up Change champs, from left, Zade Arnold, Yvette Ventura and Ross Miguel, with their winning meal.*

“They worked very hard to come up with the right recipes,” Paganelli reported. While she knew the food tasted great and met the requirements, she also knew that competition would be stiff. In fact, when it came time to pick a winner, judges Geraci and Bob Perry (a chef from the University of Kentucky) found themselves in a tough predicament. The peach cobbler from the Wisconsin team “tasted like Grandma’s. Absolutely delicious,” Geraci said. The polenta pizza from the St. Paul squad, was “unusual and delicious,” Perry said. Both judges kept going back to those beans, though. Perry said. “You just can’t recreate that flavor.” Tuesday morning, in front of nearly 700 Taking Root conference attendees, the Tohono O’odham teens were named the victors. In an event that celebrated connecting teens to the earth, showcasing local ingredients in school foods and spreading the word of farm to school efforts, the teens from Tohono O’odham beamed, standing proud at the podium and receiving a rousing ovation.

*Carol Dannhauser, from CookingTeens.com website*



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