

Expanding Opportunities for Sustainable Small Farm Specialty Crop Producers: Training Educators in Feasibility Analysis, Marketing, and Community Building

Final Report for ENC12-131

Project Type: Professional Development Program

Funds awarded in 2012: \$74,980.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2015

Region: North Central

State: North Dakota

Project Coordinator:

[Dr. Glenn Muske](#)

North Dakota State University

Project Information

Abstract:

In 2013, North Dakota Extension began an effort to develop the local foods efforts. As determined by an advisory panel of producers and service providers, two needs were outlined. The first need were the elements that drive any successful segment of the economy, ample production and sufficient demands. For North Dakota, this meant expanding the number of producers, expanding the size of existing producers, and helping the producers become better equipped in terms of their production, marketing, sales, management, and profit-analysis skills. To achieve this, required the second element, advisors, mentors, and support agencies that are prepared, and feel comfortable, in providing advice, assistance, and guidance.

The program would, if successful would: 1) increase the numbers of small specialty crop producers; 2) bring more products into the marketplace; 3) expand the marketplace; 4) encourage more and varied marketing; and 5) encourage the use of sound food safety practices at all levels.

The program offered a series of three educational programs taking a broad look at the local foods efforts in North Dakota. Topics such as building community, food safety, small farm management, the local foods movement in general, marketing and profitability were provided.

The 28 participants, 12 Extension educators and 16 ND agency and community leaders, attended the trainings. These individuals, alone or in teams, then developed 16 local projects to develop local foods in their home area. This allowed for the blending of the training received with local needs.

The results of the projects are identified in the accomplishments section.

Project Objectives:

Objectives/Performance Targets

The project objectives were met as noted in the accomplishments section. These included:

1. This project aims to expand the background, increase the skills and provide a toolbox to those individuals often called upon to answer the questions of the individual expressing the desire to meet the local food demand. Educators will feel more equipped and motivated to work with the small farm specialty crop producer.
2. To reinforce the skills acquired and to ensure continued project activity, participants will agree to implement local programming that will enhance/expand local foods understanding, use and production either through individual efforts or teams.

Accomplishments/Milestones

Similar to the objectives, the proposed accomplishments were also met although some were not met during the initially proposed time frame (See comments following).

- January-March, 2013 - Market program and solicit applications - Done although recruitment time was extended
- April, 2013 - *Local/Regional Foods: Definitions and Determining Feasibility* session. Delayed due to extended recruitment campaign. Session feedback was obtained.
- June, 2013 - Launch online resource center along with online collaboration site. Begin to add regular posts and information to the online locations.
 - Launched - Can be found at:
<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness/small-farm-farm-diversification>
- July-August, 2013 - Develop mini-grant materials to guide participants.
 - *Vision to Action* worksheet was developed and provided to participants at first session to help them plan their proposed project.
- October, 2013 - *Building Community and Food Safety* session was held in March, 2014 and feedback was gathered.
- February, 2014 - *It's a Business: Making It Profitable* session held and feedback gathered. Final project plans gathered. .
- March, 2014 - end - Market local projects being undertaken. Assist in developing greater consumer awareness of local/regional food opportunities. - Done
- March, 2014 - Mini-grant applications due and awards made - Done
- June, 2014 - Conduct mid-point evaluation. - Done - [Mid-term report Participant Sharing 12 2 2014](#)
- July, 2014 - Announce availability of resource center generally to small farm producers and those supporting that group. Also expand use of center by publicizing its availability to educators in general. -Done
- New - December, 2014 - 2nd round of grants announced and awarded. - Done
- September, 2015 - Final online survey to study program process and effectiveness and to assess impact and efficiency - Survey done in Nov and in-person at the fourth meeting of the group.
- September, 2015 - Final mini-grant reports due - Deadline extended until Nov

2015

- October-November, 2015 – Conduct interviews with selected educators and program participants. Finalize evaluation and reports. - As entire group had the opportunity to meet in person, each project offered comments of their accomplishments and hurdles they faced.

Introduction:

Today there is a rising interest in the use of local and regionally grown food. According to reports, over \$5 billion in local foods were bought in 2010. This is a significant growth from the \$1.2 billion dollars reported by the USDA in 2007. The growth seems to be driven by three reasons. First, there is a growing number of farmers markets making locally grown products available. Second, there is a growing demand in using locally grown foods. Third, there is a growing movement to nurture and develop new agriculture entrepreneurs.

The need to develop the production side of this equation has been something that USDA, through the Sustainable Agricultural Research Education (SARE) effort, desired to address (Madden, 2007, Unknown). On the marketing side, states such as North Dakota and other upper Great Plains have large rural areas with limited populations thus making it a harder to develop profitable enterprises. According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, most farms that sell directly to consumers are small farms with less than \$50,000 in total farm sales and those are located in urban corridors of the Northeast and the West Coast (Martinez, et.al, 2010). A 2010 survey of North Dakota Extension agents and others working in economic development indicated that help in marketing was most often the question for these small business operators. A North Dakota State University, May, 2011, research symposium, “Scaling Up Local & Regional Foods, confirmed the above comments and added the need for food safety and GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) training.

Two target audiences were identified. The first are producers and those thinking about developing a local foods business. The second audience were Extension agents, Agriculture Experiment Station employees, tribal college faculty, vocational agricultural instructors, Resource Conservation and Development coordinators, economic development agency employees, and others interested in being able to assist producers and in educating groups about local foods.

Cooperators

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Education & Outreach Initiatives

Objective:

Description:

Methods

The project used two methods to accomplish the objectives:

- Four educational workshops
- Development and implementation of local projects. An individual or team developed a local effort involving more people. The idea was to determine an issue that would further local food development in their area and in ND and to then develop a plan to move that idea forward. All but one of the teams developed a plan. Of those plans, all but two plans were completed, although some modifications were at times needed. The other two plans were partially completed.

Finally, although not in the plan, the project helped sponsor the 2014 USDA Agriculture Marketing Service effort to expand the awareness of the Farmers Market Promotion grant and Local Foods Promotion grant program along with providing workshops to increase the quality of the grants submitted. Two of the projects did receive funding to expand their efforts.

Outreach and Publications

Presentations at: ND 2015 Extension Conference; 2015 North Central SARE ND Tour; ND Farmers Market and Growers Association meeting; 2015 National Extension Tourism Conference; and 2015 Community Development Society Conference.

Several of the projects were highlighted in the ND Local Foods section of the NDSU Food and Nutrition website. Here is one example of the [Farmers Market Buying Club](#).

Plans are to develop the results into a blog post for [Power of Business](#), an effort of the eXtension Community, *Entrepreneurs and Their Communities*, and to use social media/email lists to further distribute the information.

The plans of our Ag Communications department are to highlight this project in a monthly infographic series they have started, probably in May during "Small Business Week."

Outcomes and impacts:

Outcomes:

- 28 people involved in further development of local foods along with 3 project leaders and an advisory board of 4 producers and 1 Extension agent
- 4 meetings of the group were held
- Educational programs provided to group included: status of local foods in ND; health department and other regulations; food safety; GAP awareness training; developing a community; farm management and profitability; resources available; and marketing
- Website of resources for [Small Farm Diversification](#) produced

Impacts:

- [ND LFLF SARE Update Nov 2015](#) PowerPoint shared at last session plus see next section
- Two of the projects did received USDA Farmers Market Promotion grant and Local Foods Promotion grants to expand their efforts.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

2015 NDSU Impact Report submitted [2015 impact report](#)

Ripple mapping reports - A qualitative look at the reach of local projects

[Collaboration on Promo](#)

[Leadership for Local Foods](#)

[Student Ag Day](#)

[Town Square FM](#)

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

The results of this grant will have on-going impact on the growth of local foods here in ND. Some of the examples of this include:

- One participant has build her own commercial kitchen and is now doing value-added processing of local foods she raises along with purchases made from other producers.
- Another participant has successfully explored the feasibility of growing gluten-free grains, amaranth and quinoa, in ND. He has been processing the grains and selling value-added products from them which also is a good test of the market. His efforts will continue.
- A modified CAS was developed in a rural location in central ND. This project will be continuing next year.
- The Bismarck-Mandan Food Coop will be opening its doors in April.
- The Grand Forks Farmers Market has started making the use of SNAP dollars available at the market and has trained two other markets in that effort. Another new farmers market has started. The Grand Forks Market will be adding a mobile food truck this coming summer to be able to bring local produce to the communities where elderly and low-income residents live.
- A look at the economic impact of local foods was done and highlighted in two conferences.
- An ugly food/food waste campaign has started to create awareness of the vast amounts of food that are wasted each year.
- Exposure of the efforts of this project have encouraged others to consider this "local project" model in their work.

Future Recommendations

I must first thank NC SARE for their belief that our project was worth investing in. The results met and exceeded our desires. While we didn't have the number of Extension people involved in projects, we always had additional Extension staff coming to our meetings to hear about what we were doing. And the turnout during the presentation at our Extension conference was excellent with lots of questions being asked.

I personally have found this project one of the easiest I have ever had in terms of grant management. You offer easy reporting and budget management.

Recommendations:

- For someone who would want to duplicate this project, I would encourage them to plan on spending more time in the recruitment phase.
- Also we probably needed to be more clear initially about the expectations. Everything turned out fine but it perhaps slowed down project startups.
- It also would be helpful to perhaps encourage people up front to plan for two-year projects. We anticipated that people might take two years to get their projects done but most of them implemented and completed their project in year two. This wasn't all bad as we then could review our financial situation and offer a second round of funding. By then the participants knew what was expected, had some experience, and also had ideas for what they would do the second round.
- A great team with a committed advisory group was crucial. The advisory group was driven by producers and agency people doing this work. This helped in development of the training topics, speaker selection, and keeping the project focused on the key needs.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or SARE.



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