

Marin Organics Cooperative Marketing Program

Final Report for FW03-107

Project Type: Farmer/Rancher

Funds awarded in 2003: \$13,500.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2003

Region: Western

State: California

Principal Investigator:

[Warren Weber](#)

Star Route Farms

Project Information

Abstract:

With this project we encouraged and facilitated the purchase locally-produced organic food in schools, farmers' markets, and retail outlets. We built public awareness and understanding of the importance of supporting local sustainable agriculture by increasing media coverage, creating an informative and attractive website, hosting and attending public events, and educating growers about sustainable practices. We provided interested ranchers and farmers with tools and information for sustaining and enhancing their operations, increasing the viability of local agriculture.

Introduction

See Summary

Project Objectives:

See summary

Cooperators

- [Ellie Rilla](#)

CA

Research

Materials and methods:

none provided

Research results and discussion:

The following results increased the economic viability for small organic growers by increasing marketing outlets and reducing farmers' costs:

- We purchased a refrigerated distribution truck and began a gleaning/buying program from our farmers for an organic school lunch program in the Novato Unified School District.

- We brought a Marin Organic farmstand to the more heavily populated suburban part of the county and sold Marin Organic produce there once a week.

- We produced 50,000 more twist ties to distribute free to our growers. We also produced more metal farm signs for farmers to hang at both their farms and at farmers' markets. We produced and distributed free of charge to our members, Marin Organic signage for use in retail outlets and at farmers' markets.

- We continued funding Juan Hidalgo, the new MOCA certification inspector that we hired in November, 2003.

Participation Summary

Educational & Outreach Activities

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:

Education/outreach description:

The following are examples of outreach to both farmers and the public (education):

- We launched a multi-page website announcing all of our projects, events, news and offerings for both growers and members. www.marinorganic.org

- We regularly publish a column in UCCE's Grown in Marin newsletter and will soon launch our own Marin Organic newsletter. The following list is a sample of just some of the article which appeared in the news media in the past few months:

- Twenty three articles in the Marin Independent Journal

- One article in California Coast & Ocean (Summer 2004)

- One article in Western Dairy Business (August 2004) and many more

- Ten of our growers, plus our executive director attended the Slow Food World Meeting of Food Communities in Turin, Italy in October, 2004. They met farmers, ranchers and food producers from around the world who are committed to preserving heirloom seed and animal stocks, creating food the old-fashioned way.

- We continued our "On the Farm" workshops for growers with workshops on: beneficial soil micro-organisms; onfarm composting; olive-growing and seed-saving.

- All of our growers and our Executive Director attended the 2004 Eco-Farm conference in northern California. Marin Organic growers Albert Straus and Warren Weber participated in a panel discussion on marketing which was moderated by Technical Advisor Ellie Rilla.

- We produced a sold-out (250 people) Harvest dinner highlighting local products featuring guest speaker Alice Waters. Growers presented their products in a jubilant farmers' market before the dinner and guests got the chance to talk to the farmers, ranchers and processors, sample their products.

- Our farmers staffed a hamburger booth at a Harvest Day celebration on an organic farm which was attended by over 2,000 people. They served burgers and salads they had raised, wearing buttons that said "I Grew It!", and talked to the customers about the food they raised.

- We produced an eight-minute video about Marin Organic, its mission and its future goals.

- We participated in the public debate about banning the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Marin County and officially endorsed the measure.

- We produced an updated brochure and distributed them at many public events around the Bay Area.

- We sponsored a bird-watching tour with a well-known bird expert at two of our farms to highlight the positive effect that a well-managed organic farm has on wildlife.

- We held a series of cooking classes called "Cooking West Marin" where celebrity chefs used local organic produce to feature their recipes. The money raised went to support the Pt. Reyes Farmers market.

- We attended Expo-west in Anaheim, the Green Festival in San Francisco.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

- Janet Brown and Marty Jacobson expanded their organic operation by leasing 4 more acres of land where they grew heirloom tomatoes, melons, corn and peppers. In addition to selling to upscale restaurants, they also set up a successful roadside farmstand.

- Rancher Kevin Lunny certified 1,400 acres of pasture organic, expanded his beef operation to include 5 acres of organic artichokes, and began working on becoming the first certified organic beef rancher in Marin County.

- Jesse Kuhn, age 26, became the latest member of Marin Organic with his 10-acre organic row-crop operation.

- Mike Gale expanded his grass-fed beef ranch to include organic heirloom pears

and apples.

- Warren Weber signed a contract with a local private school to be the supplier of organic vegetables for their school lunch program.

- We grew the number of Marin Organic growers from 18-23, so that our membership now includes 90% of the row crop farms in Marin, three beef ranches and one dairy.

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

See Accomplishments and Outreach

Future Recommendations

We have learned in the last year what our most successful programs are in terms of inciting the public's interest and supporting growers. The following are the projects we plan to pursue most vigorously next year:

1) Expand our ambitious public education program to inform people about where their food comes from and how it is produced, and how their choices at the point of sale affect not only their personal health directly, but also open space, water quality, air quality, wildlife, and the strength and balance of our community.

2) Get people out on the farm by creating a series of "Marin Organic Farm Tours" and educational workshops for school children and the general public.

3) Offer information and technical support to growers interested in transitioning from conventional to organic methods, so they can successfully make the shift to organic.

4) Continue to present monthly farmer education workshops on topics related to farm diversification, specialty crops, organic beef ranching, direct marketing from the farm, and many more.

5) Continue to offer marketing assistance to our Marin Organic members.

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