

Organic Seed Producer Database

Final Report for FW06-309

Project Type: Professional + Producer

Funds awarded in 2006: \$15,960.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2007

Region: Western

State: Washington

Principal Investigator:

[Matthew Dillon](#)

Organic Seed Alliance

Project Information

Abstract:

In response to and in partnership with producers in the western states, Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) created an online database tool that would expand marketing outreach for organic seed producers. Producer partners had input into the design and functionality of the database. The database allows seed companies and large wholesale purchasers of seeds (larger production farms/companies) to search profiles via a number of categories including but not limited to types of seed crops, forms of certification, region, years of experience. There was no charge for a producer to create a profile or for a firm to search for producers. Purchasers were also required to create a profile so that we could track the users of the tool. Marketing strategies included print advertisements in farm journals, conference presentations, email campaigns to producers and seed companies, and web site promotion, and links. Producers benefited from increased market exposure and new contracts.

Introduction

The seed sector has struggled to meet demand in an ever increasing market for organics, in part due to a lack of experienced seed producers. The “Organic Seed Producer Database” was a natural outgrowth of a prior Western SARE-funded project “Organic Vegetable Seed Production – A Farmer Education Project” (SW07-609), in that it provided producers who were developing and investing in specialty crop seed skills to begin to reach new high value markets. In addition to being an agricultural marketing opportunity, this project helped bridge a gap that in organic farming systems by improving the overall viability of the organic seed sector.

Literature and web reviews found that there this highly specialized and skilled body of producers had limited marketing tools. The seed companies have created trade associations, but seed growers associations or other marketing bodies do not exist. The seed producers that OSA works with on education and research projects requested that OSA assist them in developing marketing tools, and the Database was prioritized by the producers as the first priority in this process. In the next phase of supporting these producers OSA will be assisting them in the development

of seed associations and/or producer coops where appropriate.

Project Objectives:

- 1) With producer input, design and create a user friendly database to market seed producer skills and services
- 2) Market database to seed producers and purchasers (seed companies/larger seed users). Assist producers in creating database profiles.
- 3) Incorporate producer and purchaser feedback from initial (beta) version of database for improvements
- 4) Increase producer contacts and contracts with seed purchasers

Cooperators

- [Beth Rasgorshek](#)

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- [Don Tipping](#)

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Research

Materials and methods:

Working with producers Beth Rasgorshek and Don Tipping, OSA staff and contractors built the infrastructure of database and designed an easy- to-follow user interface. This included creating registration protocols and building forms for producers to input and manage their own listings.

Once the “beta” version of database was complete we had four producers create profiles and two seed companies conduct searches to find flaws in design or efficiency. Improvements were made and the site was formally launched with a press release, postcard mailing, and emailing to 160 producers and 28 seed companies. We also began marketing the database through advertisements, conference presentations, and at all OSA educational events. OSA assisted producers with creating profiles as needed. In November 2007 we did follow-up calls/emails to a selection of producers to assess benefits from the database.

Research results and discussion:

In an eleven-month period 67 seed producers created profiles on the database (160 registered, but not all have made profiles). In follow-up calls/emails to 10 of these producers, 100% reported that they had been contacted by at least one seed company looking to purchase or contract for seeds, 4 producers reported new contracts. Three hundred and sixty-nine individuals signed up as seed purchasers, however, in reviewing their information it is clear that the vast majority were either companies looking to sell products to farmers, or farmers looking to source organic seed - and confusing this database with an OMRI managed "organic seed database." We have strengthened the language on the registration page to clarify that this database is for sourcing seed producers, not sourcing seed. Of those 369 there are 17 that are true seed companies, and another 22 that are organic food companies who would create custom contracts for seed production. A total of 39 potential purchasers. We would like to do a full survey in fall of 2008, of all producers and purchasers, to fully assess new contractual relationships, as high value contracts rarely come about from the first handshake. We were nonetheless pleased that in this small sampling all producers had at least one call from a seed company, and that 40% had new contracts.

Participation Summary

Educational & Outreach Activities

PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:

Education/outreach description:

The only media created was the database itself. It can be found at www.seedalliance.org.

Western SARE was provided with a user account and password to further explore the database but it is not included in this web based report, open to the public, for obvious reasons of not wanting to share confidential passwords. Outreach occurred once the database was launched and continues. Postcards, mass emails, web links and advertisements informed producers of the tool. OSA also used other educational events, such as our seed production field days and seed growers conference, to sign up new producers and walk them through the profile creation process. Ideally we would export the marketing of this tool outside of the western region.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

see outcomes

Recommendations:

Potential Contributions

This database was the first such tool of its kind. It has provided producers with the power to reach companies that would otherwise have not known of their skill sets, and seed companies to reach producers with their needs. The database will continue to evolve, and a newly formed Organic Seed Trade Association has expressed interest in continuing to finance and improve the tool.

Future Recommendations

These smaller Western SARE Producer + Professional grants are excellent for very discrete projects such as the database. The proposal process is not nearly as lengthy/time consuming as the other Western SARE categories and allows for producers to receive more immediate products. Our producer-cooperators were amazed that in such a short time we were able to write a proposal, develop a technical tool, and receive direct benefits in the form of expanded markets. If at all possible, it seems like this program might function even better with a “rolling application” process - as these grants tend to address newly emerging markets, production techniques, etc. Chad Krueger's biogas project (FW06-325) is a great example of this. It would be a benefit to innovation to have a highly responsive flexible grant program (smaller funding) with a rolling application. Obviously this would create administrative challenges for the program, but if they could be overcome the benefit would be great.

As for future recommendations of seed projects, we always ask our producers to share their ideas for new projects. Producers have given the input that they would like to have the database expand to have an online forum to share production and marketing questions, techniques, etc.; virtual community for disseminating information producer to producer. Producers have also expressed interest in creating a federated seed growers cooperative; a national cooperative made up of regional clusters of seed growers that provided custom contracting services, generated seed lists from which companies could purchase wholesale quantities of seed, and even provided stock seed and breeding services. OSA is engaging in a feasibility study to examine these requests and determine possible solutions.

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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