

# IBC Technical Services to Farmer's/Ranchers for Online Markets in South Central Idaho

## Final Report for FW08-318

Project Type: Farmer/Rancher

Funds awarded in 2008: \$29,997.00

Projected End Date: 12/31/2008

Region: Western

State: Idaho

Principal Investigator:

[Judy Hall](#)

Idaho's Bounty Co-op

## Project Information

Abstract:

### a. SUMMARY

This program funded by Western SARE provided technical assistance to farmers/ranchers about marketing their products online with the goal of expanding markets for sustainable, locally grown food. In addition to this training, basic marketing, packaging and labeling skills were taught on an individual basis to help small-scale producers. Other solutions were to provide peer-to-peer training and technical training.

## Introduction

This program was designed because there was a need expressed by many area agricultural producers to expand their markets. They were involved in Farmer's Markets and CSA's, some in stores, but they wanted to grow and make more money. Idaho's Bounty Cooperative (IBC) provides a year-round market opportunity via the web for area small-scale farmers and ranchers. There was agreement by area producers that they could benefit from this new form (online) of marketing but there was a need expressed for help with using it such as general "how to," printing labels, website design, packaging, pricing, etc.

Project Objectives:

III. Objectives/Performance targets as stated in the application

"Information will be disseminated through:

1. the (four) workshops in four different geographical areas within south central Idaho and then,
2. the Trainer will visit farmers/ranchers for individual help.
3. The three producers in this program (Ballards, Burns, and McMahans) will provide training in a peer-to-peer capacity to speak about their experience and the advantages to online and direct market sales. The producer applicants have agreed to do this.

4. The Trainer will rely on the technical assistance of Red Earth web designer, Emma McCauley and Oklahoma Co-op staff to help solve these technical issues. Training sessions will be open to all who are interested including those farmers and ranchers who are not currently practicing sustainable methods of production but are interested in converting to sustainable methods.”

## Cooperators

- [Steve & Stacie Ballard](#)

[ballardcheese@msn.com](mailto:ballardcheese@msn.com)

Producer Cooperators

Ballard Family Dairy and Cheese

1764 S. 2100 East

Gooding, ID 83330

(208) 934-4972 (office)

## Research

### Materials and methods:

As this was not a research project the only methods used were education and training, including:

peer-to-peer councils

one-on-one training

phone consultation

printed materials

web and email communication

educational workshops

### Research results and discussion:

#### IV. Outcomes and Impacts

1. IBC held 3 educational workshops instead of 4 as planned. Over 50 producers were reached and over half came to all 3 workshops. (We were not able to fit in a 4th workshop before planting season began.)

2. Individual help for specific online technical problems was provided primarily over the phone on a case-by-case basis. Individual technical assistance for specific problems was also available at every workshop.

3. Three producer partners spoke at at least 1 of each of the meetings about their experience with IBC and gave their advice and suggestions.

4. In December of 2007 when IBC originally designed the grant, we hoped to bring the original developer of the software, Emma McCauley, out to Idaho. By the fall of 2008, due to the success of her consulting business Emma had hired a second web designer to help create a new version of the online marketing software. She was no longer available to fly from Oklahoma to Idaho. Instead she appointed Roy Guisinger to work very closely with IBC staff on a regular basis and train them to identify and solve web marketing issues.

5. Additional Beneficial (unplanned) Outcomes:

6. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture handbook, Starting Specialty Foods Business, was handed out to each participant. And two presentations from the state Department of Ag were given:

ii. By Idaho Preferred: <http://www.idahopREFERRED.com/>

about their Chef Collaboratives around the state where Producers can meet chefs. They also talked about the Farm to School opportunities for producers to meet new customers and expand markets.

iii. By Ag in The Classroom, which is the Idaho version of the national program. <http://www.agclassroom.org/>

iv. Presentation by Red Feather Bitter Creek Restaurant: how to work with a restaurant. How much business they do, what they buy each year. Help with growing wholesale business.

v. In an attempt to make a link between customers and producers to expand markets IBC passed out a list of food that customers want.

Idaho's Bounty Products Needed, contact for more information:

[jwall@idahosbounty.org](mailto:jwall@idahosbounty.org) or [laura@idahosbounty.org](mailto:laura@idahosbounty.org)

The following is a start on a list of products we are looking to discuss with anyone interested in growing them.

Products we would love to sell and currently have none of:

Broccoli / broccolini

Asparagus!

Mini peppers and pepper varieties

Fennel

Sprouts - spicy and/or broccoli or others

Tofu!

Avocados (can it be done here?)

Oats

Lentils

Flour: white, farrow, spelt

Quinoa

Sweet potatoes and yams

cabbages

mushrooms

sesame seeds, etc.

Garbanzo beans

Hominy

Other artisan cheeses

prepared dinners, lunches

garlic

Products we will need a much larger supply of:

Eggs

Carrots

Any other root vegetables that will last into winter sales: beets, etc.

Fruit - berries especially, and any others too (Lee's melons were a huge hit)

Sweet cherry tomatoes (golden and others)

Goat cheese

b. IBC worked with the Wood River Resource Conservation District to get a grant writer for producers to help write applications for Value-Added Grants. Mike Heath is looking into frozen food. He already sends his food to be frozen and sold on the commodity market. He is applying for a grant to keep this food local. This would be an entirely new market for local producers and since IBC already is a year-round

market this would be a new product category.

## **Participation Summary**

### Educational & Outreach Activities

#### **PARTICIPATION SUMMARY:**

Education/outreach description:

VII. Potential Contributions, Outreach continued

a. IBC will post on its site the highlights of feedback and recommendations from Producers gleaned at these trainings. By posting these comments online they become available to any producer interested in how to market their products through an online coop such as Idaho's Bounty.

### Project Outcomes

Project outcomes:

V. Accomplishments

This program was designed to teach farmers and ranchers about the specifics of online marketing. We attracted new producers to these workshops who had not marketed online before. The large formats of the workshops were excellent venues for building community and sharing successes, hints and solutions. They served the purpose of introducing web marketing to producers on a very general basis. Individual consulting for problems as they came up proved to be a much more valuable way to educate producers on marketing on the web. The bulk of the help to farmers and ranchers occurred this way.

a. What follows are highlights from the Peer-to-Peer Education objective on marketing that occurred at the 3 workshops. These are quotes and examples of how producers shared their experiences in the larger group with those who did not understand the value of online marketing. This was their preferred method of communicating and it serves as an informal survey of their feedback. It was very effective, and possibly more effective than having a professional, who is not a grower, advocate. Then if an individual was interested in trying these ideas out they contacted Laura Theis or Jeannie Wall at IBC and they were given special, individualized attention to these ideas. This Training has introduced farmers who have never done it before to the basic concepts of selling online.

- Stacie Ballard (Ballard Dairy and Cheese, Gooding) on why she does online marketing and what works for her: 'Transparency helps, the customer can go online and "meet you." Be cautious. (She told producers it is OK to make incremental steps, take a small risk and let IBC take some of the risk.) She also gave an example of how she received individual help on a specific packaging problem she had. She came to a working agreement mutually beneficial to Ballard's and IBC.

- Ed and Crista Lucero (Morning Owl Farm, Richfield): 'Because of our experience with Idaho's Bounty our son and daughter-in-law took an educated risk and raised over 300 turkeys. Now we sell them year round, smoked, not just at Thanksgiving.'

- Teresa Strohlberg (The Ecology Patch, Buhl): 'I grossed over 5 figures this year. I

would like to train an apprentice. We are all part of a team and we need each other.'

- Beth Church lives in an isolated area far from markets: 'I was able to try out my new product, get feedback that people valued my product. That helped me gain confidence to grow more.'
  - Lee Rice: 'Our retail business is built on reputation, through IBC (website and events) they get to know who we are and can come back. In a conventional store they do not know who produces their food.' 'IBC is especially helpful to the fresh produce grower because when the food comes on you have to sell a lot of it. If you are a small grower and not big enough to play in the big field then IBC helps you to have a large enough market to sell when your product is ready and ripe.'
  - Clarence Stillwell (Fair Mountain Farms, Fairfield): 'We can now see (online) that there is a need for more product in the winter so they are researching winter crops for next year.' 'IBC comes to us to pick up our food when we don't have time to drive.'
  - Phil Lansing: French farmers put a band around every chicken they grow so that their customers can find them.
  - Mary Rohlfig (Morning Owl Duck Farm, Boise): 'I designed a quiche that I call: Mostly Local Quiche and it is a good way to sell (duck eggs) value added.'
  - VeeBee Honey: Is doing twice as much business as she did before IBC. She used to sell to the honey commodity market. No one knew who she was, she got less for her product and she was anonymous. Now she makes more money and is getting to know her customers.
  - Beth Ragorshek (Wheat farmer, Meridien): 'IBC is a great way for me to extend my income season.'
  - Gayle (California Bull Elk): 'IBC's website searches for and finds the customers for me.'
  - Lara: small individual grower who is thinking of starting to grow in a greenhouse. IBC enables her to take this step.
  - Experienced Chef, Ric Lum has moved to Bliss: he advertised to producers at one workshop that he wants to do Farm Dinners this summer and feature their products.
- b. Other miscellaneous remarks: 'It is an outlet for raising awareness for the value of eating fresh local food.'

- 'What I value the most is the year-round winter Market opportunity.'
- 'Nice to have new market opportunities opening so we can tell young people to come and work on the farm.'

#### VI. Additional Accomplishments/Outcomes from Training that serves Farmers Based on Producers Feedback at Workshops:

IBC put together a handout to go in customer's bags that explains the pricing of IBC products to educate the consumer, change perceptions and help increase sales. Standardizing sizes and amounts makes it easier for the customer to comparison shop and the producer to package. IBC did this and trained producers on it.

#### Examples of Marketing Hints from the Trainings:

1. It is a very good idea is to email the other members of the co-op. They did join the co-op because they want more contact with their producer. So IBC encourages producers to contact their members and ask for their feedback, ask how much they want to order next year.
2. Try putting things on sale or two for one to get them to look at your products; anything on sale looks tempting

3. Give a gift discount at holiday time.

They wanted their loyal customers identified so now they can look online and see who buys how much from them so they can offer their loyal customers specials, or put a free item in their bag, a taster.

4. To minimize trips for the producer to deliver their orders they started selling meat in bundles.

5. Producers who did not know how to price their product were able to go online and see what other producers are pricing and selling their product for and to price accordingly.

a. Producers feel that larger numbers coming together in an organized manner become a force for change (and better) for everyone involved. They appreciated meeting together to help each other be better at what they do.

b. IBC customers were asking what kind of grain was being fed to some chickens that were for sale. This prompted a producer to look for a grower who would grow non-GMO grain for him to feed his poultry. Through the IBC network he found one. This helps the grower of the grain to sell more product (100 tons) and the poultry farmer to produce a value-added chicken.

Another producer who used to be a dairy farmer, Bill Gayle, has started a value added beef product

<http://pastureproper.com/contact.php> and sells it through IBC. He spoke about how when he was a dairy farmer he was anonymous. He never knew where his milk was going or who drank it. Now there is a face to his customers and he "is having the time of his life." Bill is an inspiration to others.

At the encouragement of producers to go ahead and sell more product in Boise, IBC met with Boise State University's food services department and is starting to develop a relationship. The first products are dried beans. Conversation is happening with St. Luke's Hospital, they are next.

The most valuable part of these workshops was having the producers help each other. And then be able to go online and contact any other members and ask for their help. IBC is the means, the network has been created.

Presentations by Ag in The Classroom. Teachers become a source for promoting local producers. <http://www.agclassroom.org/>

Recommendations:

## Potential Contributions

### VII. Potential Contributions, Outreach

These Trainings taught Producers how to market themselves online by posting their personal stories. This develops customer relationships and loyalty almost as successfully as at a Farmer's Market but with more leverage. The customer can go online any time day or night to read about the stories. Food is no longer anonymous when you can go online and see the face of your food. This is certainly an even more effective medium than the anonymity of a store.

What follows are: EXAMPLES OF MARKETING STORIES ON WEBSITE FOR ALL PRODUCERS TO SEE AND LEARN FROM

<http://www.idahosbounty.org/shop/producers/cowss.php>

Examples of stories/descriptions by Producers on the IBC website.

Fish Processors Fish Breeders of Idaho

Leo & Tod Ray Hagerman, ID

Product Types: Fish: trout, tilapia, and catfish

#### About Us

Located in the scenic Snake River Canyon of Southern Idaho, Fish Breeders of Idaho produces and processes the highest quality rainbow trout, catfish and tilapia. With dedication to quality and service, our staff controls the entire process from egg through production to processing, marketing, and distribution, assuring our customer the finest quality product.

Idaho is famous for its crystal clear spring water. In this water Fish Breeders of Idaho raise their rainbow trout. In the same area Fish Breeders has hot artesian wells that produce abundant quantities of 95-degree water. Mixing this hot artesian water with cold spring water produces the ideal temperature for growing catfish and tilapia.

Leo and Judy Ray built their first catfish fish farm in the Imperial Valley of California in 1969. In search of a new and better way to grow catfish, Leo and Judy moved to Idaho in 1973. Geothermal water, concrete raceways, high-density production and temperature control was first successfully introduced to catfish production.

Introducing this technology to tilapia production was the next step in their goal to stay at the forefront of aquaculture technology. Rainbow trout was added to the operation in 1978. Fish Breeders of Idaho will lead the industry in new production and technology in the future.

The high quality of the fish is no accident. The better flavor, texture and overall quality are results of clean, clear water flowing through concrete raceways. A total exchange of clean, clear water every five minutes in each production unit insures excellent flavor. Swimming in a constant current, the fish develop a firm texture.

#### II. Durand Farms

Vicky & Dan Durand

Richfield, Id

Product Types: Farm Fresh Brown Eggs

#### About Us

We are a family farm located six miles north of Richfield, Idaho, and have been in operation for the past thirty-six years. We applied for organic certification on our hay, grain and pasture. On June 24, 2008, we received our organic certification. We produce alfalfa hay, grain and pasture along with our eggs. Because our lovely farm flock has grown, we now have delicious eggs to share with others who appreciate the difference of a real farm fresh egg.

Our Black Australorps, Barred Rocks and Golden Sex-Links all produce brown eggs and are free range. Our hens enjoy the bountiful variety that Southern Idaho provides.

We believe that happy and contented chickens lay the best eggs. We raise our chickens from babies and they are friendly and happy in their surroundings. We do close them up at night in their chicken house to keep them safe from predators.

We love our eggs for the colorful yolks and great flavor that only free ranging chickens can produce. We believe that you will too.

Browse through our Products for Sale

Practices (our standards for raising or making our products)

Our hens are happily free ranged. We feed natural grains and alfalfa hay and pasture. Each day our eggs are gathered, candled and refrigerated.

#### 3. Morning Star Organic Farm

Ed & Christa Lucero

1146 E. 820 N.

Richfield, ID 83349 moo4milk@magiclink.com

208-487-2882 (home)

[www.morningstarorganics.com](http://www.morningstarorganics.com)

Product Types: Organic Vegetables, and Specialty Organic Products.

#### About Us

Mission Statement: Morning Star Organic Farm's mission is to be a locally owned and operated, we use only organic practices for our farm and dairy. Our operational belief is to produce natural products, the way God intended, with attention to detail and integrity. Family Owned & Operated: Morning Star Organic Farm's business practices are as traditional as our historic roots. The farm was homesteaded in 1907 by Christa's grandfather Powell, Christa's father started dairying in 1946 doing things the right way. Today, Morning Star Organic Farm is USDA certified organic and located in the heart of the Magic Valley, Richfield, Idaho. Passionate about each and every pasture fed, naturally sustained, and antibiotic free cow. Herd health and environmentally friendly farm practices are a vital component of Morning Star Organic Farm's philosophy, All of our organic manure goes back into the soil to provide us with the most incredible pastures for our cattle, and the most fertile soil for our gardens. Growing up here we had a sign on our wall, "ALL THAT WE HAVE WE OWE TO UDDERS" we didn't realize at the time just exactly what it meant, but now we know that all that we have we do owe to "udders" not others, but cow "udders."

#### Future Recommendations

This is not a future recommendation for Western SARE however it is worth noting. Based on the success of this Western SARE grant and how many producers (40) in South Central Idaho benefited, IBC is able to demonstrate the need and apply for another grant to help producers market their products year-round online. In cooperation with the North West Cooperative Development Center IBC and its producer members are applying for an FMPP grant through the USDA to establish a Training Program in the northwest for other food co-ops and interested individuals to learn how to start their own online local food coop. This will be a tremendous opportunity to promote the value and success of online marketing for small farm families and ranchers throughout the northwest and will open up even more markets for local farmers.

In the future there may be the opportunity to link up websites so that all local food co-ops could share bulk orders and trade with each other.

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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