

SARE Final Grant Report
FNE02-444
Concord Cooperative CSA
Legal name "Local Harvest CSA"

1. Name and address of farmer/grower.

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2. Goals of the project.

The primary goal of the project was to establish a working cooperative (multi-farm) CSA in the Concord, NH area.

3. Information about our farm.

Good Earth Farm was the farmer/grower applicant for the SARE grant. We are a certified organic vegetable and greenhouse farm. We helped to create and organize the cooperative CSA. We will be farmer-members of the cooperative CSA. Also, I will serve three formal functions for the cooperative: member of the Board of Directors, Treasurer and Production Manager.

4. Cooperators and their roles.

Our major collaborator was NOFA-NH. The Office Manager for NOFA-NH, Elizabeth Obelenus, and I have worked together to bring the coop into being. We divided the labors. I was responsible for legal organization and farmer production issues. Elizabeth worked on membership development and distribution plans.

5. What we did and how it was done.

Develop farmer members. We contacted many organic farmers and an organic baker in our area and developed a group of people willing and interested in joining a cooperative CSA.

Monthly meetings. We have been meeting monthly for the past 8 months.

Legal organization. Our first issue was to write articles of incorporation and bylaws. We wrote these documents ourselves and then submitted them to an attorney for advice. We spent hours and hours discussing each point in our legal structure. We have a Board of Directors and elected officers.

Farmer issues. We have established a marketing agreement, a bidding system for crops, and packing standards.

Distribution plan. We have rented a location (large common room/cafeteria at the Concord Unitarian Church) for the summer of 2003 to serve as our weekly drop-off and pick-up site.

Membership development. We have created a brochure and printed 2000 copies for distribution. We are now working on distributing these brochures to the public, scheduling publicity events and sending out press releases.

Employees. The SARE grant money will take us to the end of our membership development. Next year we will have three employees:

- Production manager (organize what crops the farmers will bring each week)
- Site Coordinator (responsible for receiving the goods and then preparing them for distribution to coop members)
- Bookkeeper (responsible for receiving money and for paying the farmers and other bills of the coop).

6. Results.

We are very pleased that we have accomplished what we had set out to do.

(a) Our coop is now a legally organized business in the State of New Hampshire.

(b) We have eight farmer-members who are committed to growing specific crops for the 2003 growing season. We have commitments to provide enough food for at least 100 members for 18 weeks. Our original goal was four farmers. We also have an organic baker, who is a producer member, who will sell bread. Our farmer members also have other products they may offer to the membership (e.g. maple syrup, berries, etc.)

(c) We have a marketing plan to recruit consumer members to join the coop. Our goal was to have 20 members by the end of 2002 and 60 members by summer 2003. As stated above, we have increased our goal for 2003 to 100 or more consumer members. Given the initial response we believe that this goal is reasonable. Steps we are taking include:

- Some of our farmers are sending copies of the brochures to customers on their mailing lists.
- Brochures are being distributed at the organic bakery, the local food cooperative, government offices, churches and other public meeting places.
- Good Earth Farm used to have a satellite CSA drop off at a local conservation agency in Concord. People who work there are excited to see CSA return to Concord.

(d) Time frame on membership development. Our attorney advised us not to begin distributing brochures until we were legally incorporated. Becoming legally incorporated took longer than we had anticipated for two reasons.

(1) Drafting our articles and bylaws. They went through numerous revisions including back and forth correspondence with our attorney. We worked out the details as a group which helped us get to know each other and develop the skills to work together as a group. I believe that this is responsible for our ability to work on other matters (e.g. crop bidding) in a productive and respectful manner.

(2) It took longer than we had anticipated to have our articles and bylaws approved by the legal authorities (the NH Secretary of State/ Attorney General's Office). Apparently their delay was because we are incorporated under a 1925 New Hampshire Statute specific to agricultural marketing cooperatives. That statute has not been used for many decades and they had to research it thoroughly. I should note that we had to research it thoroughly ourselves in order to write the articles and bylaws.

7. Site conditions on farm.

Not applicable.

8. Budget.

Our major expense (\$4350 out of \$7200) was labor for the people who did the leg work to get the coop started. Elizabeth's share of that was \$3,600 - half of the entire grant. At this point Elizabeth has put in many more hours than we have paid her for.

Our attorney has cost about \$200 more than we had budgeted (despite the fact that she has done a great deal of work for us at no charge). Our brochures have cost about \$600 less than we had budgeted.

We do look forward to receiving the second half of our grant money so that we can settle up our accounts with Elizabeth and pay any additional marketing expenses.

9. New ideas/next step.

We are eager to get going on our first year of production. As we go along we will evaluate our progress and make changes. At the end of next year we will do a complete review and make changes that will make our effort stronger. We have the goal of eventually extending our season into the fall by several weeks and seeing our customer base increase from 100 to 200 or even 300 families within the next three or four years.

Also, we realize that we will probably need another substantial grant to help us get to that point. There are enough fixed costs (site rental, insurance, etc.) that a greater customer base is needed for long term economic sustainability.

10. Will we use the practice we investigated?

Yes, enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

11. Outreach.

We are committed to using our efforts as a model for other groups interested in starting cooperative CSAs. We are giving a presentation at a forum in Vermont (sponsored by Vermont NOFA and the Vermont CSA Network) on January 11, 2003 regarding cooperatives and CSA. We plan to make our articles, bylaws, marketing agreement, packing standards and crop bidding information available to other groups who are interested in forming a cooperative CSA. Anyone interested could contact me directly.

12. Name and date.

David Trumble
Good Earth Farm
December 29, 2003