

**MARKETING
TO PRESCHOOL AND AFTER SCHOOL
PROGRAMS & PARENTS: FNE04-508
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Marketing to Preschool, After School Programs and Parents

(2.) Grant Goals:

- 1. Find a year round market for local value added fresh and frozen Hometown Food products within public school and preschool feeding sites by researching the needs of child care feeding, sampling and sales venues.**
- 2. Educate future customers about the nutritional value of Hometown Food products for improving their health.**
- 3. Deliver samples and learn how children, parents and day care providers react to the new products sampled through this grant.**

(3.) Farmland and Farm Kitchen Profile:

My small farm is 15 acres, consisting of a rented ten acre pasture and a one acre fenced raised bed garden, a 50 ft. heated greenhouse, a 1400 sq. ft. Agriculture and Markets and Health Department approved kitchen (See Appendix I) with a walk in cooler and freezer. The raised bed garden is used to test "freezer friendly" and fresh varieties of asparagus, zucchini, butternut squash, onions, lettuce, cucumbers, peppers, pumpkins, muskmelons, watermelons, honeydew melons, red and green rhubarb, garlic, plus yellow and red stuffing tomatoes. Organic string beans, carrots and fruits are purchased from other nearby farmers. We buy and freeze cheese in family sized portions. Our USDA inspected local meat patties and sliced meat strips come to us frozen and vacuum packaged from nearby meat processing facilities. Most of the work is done with the help of one other person. We soon expect to move from the research and development stage to marketing and distribution as a result of this grant.

In April 2004, the sole proprietorship business form (Hudson Valley Hometown Foods) was changed to a single person LLC (Hometown Foods, LLC). I, a retired Home Economics teacher, anticipate adding people to my company using this business form so that it can continue beyond me.

An unusual feature of my farm kitchen operation includes having an intern, a Cornell Food Science graduate, Riyani Wiharsa, for a year from May 2004 to May 2005. She assisted with the research and development of materials for this grant. She came trained in the science of taking food apart and is now trained and committed to being a "whole foods innovator and advocate". She is considering future training as a dietitian to add to her credentials.

Another new feature is our recently purchased nutrient analysis program—NUTRIBASE. Paying someone else to do food labels was cost prohibitive because

we handle so many products and need frequent recipe modifications. We now design convenience foods from local produce knowing the nutrients that each ingredient contributes to the overall nutrient density. We are committed to helping our customers meet the 2005 Dietary Recommendations with increased emphasis on the use of whole fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, and beans (legumes). We will also be using low fat meats and dairy products in reasonable portion sizes.

(7.) Conditions on the farm did not affect the results.

(8.) Economic findings: No sales as yet have resulted from this community research project.

The rest of this report will visit one goal at a time covering 4. participants involved in that goal; the activities and changes occurring in the methods used; 6. the results of the experience; 9. New ideas generated by the grant (assessment); 10. adoption of activities and 11. Outreach materials and activities.

Goal 1:

Find a year round market for local value added fresh and frozen Hometown Food products within public school and preschool feeding sites by researching the needs of child care feeding, sampling and sales venues.

4. **Participants:** Laurie Wolfe, Anna Dawson, Riyani Wiharsa

5. **Activities and changes:**

Early in February, March and April 2004, Anna Dawson, grant writer, and Laurie Wolfe, assistant researcher, visited day care sites, after school programs and preschool play groups to observe snack programs, interview program directors, see food preparation facilities and provide tastes of Hometown Food products.

Sites visited in Columbia County:

1. Two large after school snack programs (100+ children) observed only
- (9.) Five large daycare centers (over 30 children each) meal samples given to daycare directors
- (10.) Four morning play groups (approximately 25 children and parents) display board, samples of smoothies, product catalog
- (11.) Two small family day care providers (6 to 12 children and two staff) product evaluation questionnaire, newsletters and samples
- (12.) One town park summer Youth Fair—town purchased smoothies free to children

(13.) Four elementary open houses—catalog brochures, samples of Dilly Dressing

Laurie found a full time job and was replaced in May 2004 by Riyani, the Cornell intern. Riyani helped with the summer youth fair. In September 2004, Anna and Riyani participated in a PTA Nutrition Committee snack table for four primary and elementary school open houses. Approximately 600 children, staff and parents attended. This resulted from our participation on the PTA Nutrition Committee—part of a Healthy Heart Grant initiative in Columbia County in which five centralized schools are actively involved.

Directors were interviewed to learn where they shopped, who did the cooking, what they bought, what foods they served, and how they accessed local farm products. We saw sample menus, borrowed the CACFP manual (Child and Adult Care Food program) “Crediting Foods in CACFP” and inquired about what could be done to make their job of providing snacks and meals easier.

We studied two family day care providers and one large center nearby in depth. We provided meal components from the Hometown Foods’ kitchen—a different product each week for a month for staff, parents and children. Once, we set up a farmers’ market style display table with samples at a family day care center. We discussed the possibility of doing fundraisers with the directors of three large centers.

(14.) Results:

Where they shop and who cooks:

Day care providers primarily buy their foods from a local large scale distributor, Ginsberg; from large super markets such as Price Chopper and Shop Rite; or from discount supermarkets such as Walmart, Sam’s Club, Save A Lot, and Aldi. Most daycare providers do not buy from farmers, farm stands or farmers markets. Large not for profits have central school lunch personnel cater the food sourced from the school lunch and snack offerings. One daycare requires the parents to provide most of their child’s food from home because no kitchen is at the site. Some CSA’s donate food and some migrant parents bring donated orchard fruits. One family day care provider hires a relative who is a dietitian to cater their lunch meal from a brother’s purchased CSA share.

What is bought and served?:

Large centers in our rural county:

If there is a satisfactory food budget, fresh produce is provided and a full time cook makes meals and nutritious snacks from scratch. Menus are well thought out

and nutritious. The only improvement needed here is for farms to notify daycare providers about the produce they have through some kind of distribution and delivery system that currently does not exist. If there is a small food budget, a full time cook uses the lowest cost convenience foods such as institutional sized canned fruits and vegetables, pre-made frozen convenience items and bread and cereal products. Milk is bought at the lowest price from a grocery discount store like Aldi.

Family Day Care:

Several family day care providers shop on Saturday at large stores for a two-week supply of convenience foods. The menus reflect a lack of updated nutrition knowledge. Food providers are unaware of the latest fads in the food processing industry and have difficulty choosing foods wisely. Help is needed to understand the 21st century grocery product world for all consumers.

Family day care providers need the most help due to their small staff. Most family day care providers have to do it all: plan the meals and snacks; shop for the food; fill out the reimbursement forms; prepare the meals the night before; and then serve the food. They do the best they can. Time, energy, cooking talent, kitchen space or lack thereof, and minimal nutrition planning assistance cause some providers to ask parents to provide the food from the grocery store's latest concoctions.

Farmers' Market display table sampling is ineffective in this environment. The best tasting is done at the meal and snack times provided by caregivers—whether parents or day care providers. The sporadic nature of fundraisers fails to provide parents with healthy regional food choices year round. Few day care providers have the staff or parent time to deal with fundraiser sales.

Through this grant we identified the real problem faced by all local consumers. Daycare represents us all. There is no effective year round, regionally produced food system currently reaching out to provide healthy, quick to prepare, meal or snack choices for parents and childcare providers. We all need efficient delivery of local convenience products at reasonable prices.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

CACFP encourages providers to shop large supermarkets for the cheapest prices. Many family and large day care providers do not participate in the program because it is complex and requires a lot of paper work. A state audit of menus and expenditures causes stress on already stressed providers.

Major finding:

There is definitely a local market for nutrient dense, whole fruit, vegetable and whole grain snacks and meal kits for children at day care settings and in the child's

home that is easily ordered, reasonably priced and conveniently delivered. Locally frozen convenience food products such as stir-fry meal kits, fruit sauces and compotes, whole grain cooked cereals and soup kits provide time starved day care providers and parents with healthy food choices. Freshly prepared deli products (salads, washed fruit, refrigerated cottage cheese snacks and steamed or fresh vegetables with dip) encourage healthy food habits if available to parents and child care providers.

Small-scale food settings such as group homes, school snacks, day care meals, after school programs, and summer recreation food programs are perfect settings for local marketing. Small scale processing kitchens can easily provide the added value to local farm foods that caterers or restaurants offer their patrons. These processors, if provided updated training, can duplicate the products developed and proven at Hometown Foods, LLC. This would give them a year round market with only a small added investment to existing facilities.

School cafeteria feeding programs, however, are not fertile ground for small producers and processors because of the difficulty of competing with USDA surplus food programs and large scale processing.

(9.) New ideas to solve the problem of finding a year round market.

A year round market for local fresh and frozen convenience foods is in every local community and can be found at small group child and adult care feeding sites. We just have to provide healthy food of sufficient quantity, easily accessed and delivered.

(10.) Adoption: continue to use or revise the practice you investigated

Family day care providers and parents need healthier convenience foods so Hometown Foods, LLC will continue to reach out to Columbia County day care programs in our future plans. In the immediate future, we will also work with elementary school parents and snack programs at our local districts.

(11.) Outreach

Local:

There is a Columbia County Child Care Council that provides training programs for certified family day care providers. Hometown Foods, LLC can offer a tasting experience along with a training session for the Council. The council is committed to improving the foods available to children in community settings.

We will reconnect with the play groups, after school programs and with the PTA nutrition committee to offer fresh and frozen foods for their snack programs. We

will offer day care providers—large centers and family day cares—access to regional frozen convenience meal kits and fresh fruit and vegetable snack components for lunch and snack. In addition, we will offer staff and parents access to regional fresh and frozen foods for their homes with an easy ordering method, reasonable prices and convenient delivery.

NY State:

Anna Dawson has brought the daycare feeding issues to NY Farms “Farm to School” committee asking that they set up a sub-committee to look into daycare needs. Daycare needs were also brought to the attention of the NY Republican Agriculture Committee at a winter “meet the producers” forum at Soil and Water in Hudson and to a dietitian on a state taskforce to update CACFP guidelines.

Goal 2. Educate consumers about the nutritional value of Hometown Food products for improving their health.

4). Participants:

The participants in this part of the grant were 45 parents and five staff in three daycare settings, two family day care and one large center. These participants were provided with newsletters describing the food value of each of the products provided. A nutrition label was provided for two products. Other participants included the Ichabod Crane PTA Nutrition Committee and their snack improvement program. Cooperative extension shared their extensive nutrition library with us.

(5) Project activities and changes:

Recipe analysis:

Two recipes were analyzed by a professional dietitian—a quick bread and Dilly Dressing at a cost of \$65 for each one. Since we were developing new products, we decided it would be cheaper to buy Nutribase—a nutrient analysis program for \$500 and do the work ourselves. We put a nutrition facts label on two products. Because we are dedicated to creating nutrient dense food combinations, product development decisions must be based on nutrient analysis. We also provided objective nutrient analysis of snacks that PTA parents provided at the open houses.

Newsletters:

We developed five nutrition education newsletters (See Appendix A) that were attached to the samples for parents and staff at the two family day cares and the one large center.

Nutrition presentation to parents:

We discussed holding presentations about our foods for parents. However, the majority of directors thought that the parents would not be interested in “healthy” foods. We did not hold any presentations.

Nutrition education website: www.ourhometownfoods.com (See Appendix B)

Riyani Wiharsa and Anna Dawson created a “Publisher” formatted, 50 page website providing complete nutrition information for our frozen and vacuum packaged products that is due up by our webmaster in May 2005. Our website gives a “complete” analysis of our products; links consumers to up-to-date nutrient knowledge provided on www.whfood.com, the world’s healthiest foods website and provides the latest antioxidant research about 100 whole foods in a simple format.

(6.) Results

Many people (child care providers, parents and children) have incorrect ideas about what is a nutritious snack or meal. Even CACFP guidelines accept pie crust and turnovers for snack or breakfast. A complete, objective nutritional analysis provides credibility and objectivity where subjectivity is king—favorite foods.

Daycare providers, parents and staff appreciated the nutrition labels on the products. PTA committee members were impressed with our nutrition analysis comparing a “healthy?” Chocolate Zucchini Cake” snack with our “Dilly Dressing” and carrots snack idea. They decided to ask for funds from a county Healthy Heart grant for a dietitian to help their nutrition committee.

We could not tell if the newsletters were effective nutrition education materials but believe the website is the best way to provide information for easy access by consumers. We have added the newsletters to our website. On the product catalog we created, we have included some nutrition highlights about our products. Complete nutrition information is definitely a “value added” piece to marketing regional foods. Required nutrition labels do not provide the whole story about whole foods.

At presentations with samples, we talked about the nutritional value and found out that there definitely was an interest in healthy regional convenience foods. However, there was always too little time to really teach the specifics with a sample and short conversation. So we decided the website would be helpful.

The PTA Nutrition Committee would like our company to work on a project providing nutritious morning snacks to the K, 1st and 2nd grade primary school program—300 children. They are also interested in exploring using our teaching

expertise and low fat dairy recipes to apply for a Dairy grant for an after school program housed at the middle school that serves 60 children.

(9.) New ideas generated from the assessment

1. New idea: Dietitians are needed!

The PTA nutrition committee decided to ask for a small \$1000 Healthy Heart Grant to work with a dietitian for their parent group. This dietitian used to run a local CSA farm. Dietitians are an important key to telling the true story about local whole foods.

In a January 2005 survey, Iowa State marketing professor, Kay Palan (kpalan@iastate.edu), found that consumers would buy high quality, conveniently accessible and reasonably priced regional food if nutrition professionals were part of the communication process. Dietitians can help providers design menus using nutrient analyzed healthier meal and snack choices that use regionally grown and processed whole foods.

2. Local kitchens can help day care providers!

Agriculture and Markets and Health Department approved and inspected kitchens on farms, at caterers, in restaurants, at churches, at community clubs (Elks, Rod & Gun, Fire Houses, etc.) might consider providing a community service by preparing and selling lunches to family daycare providers using nutritious recipes and local whole foods.

3. CACFP guidelines need revision.

4. Opportunity for small-scale food processors and incubator kitchens:

Small-scale food processors might consider freezing and vacuum packaging the harvest for "meal kits" modeled after our products for parents, day care and other small group meal sites for cooks to finish preparing.

5. All farmers' whole food products should be completely nutrient analyzed for promotional purposes. Apples are great but they can't talk from a farm stand shelf or teach without some help from a website or signs. This is a service that could be provided through culinary programs as part of their training program.

4. Dietitians, nutritionists, cooks, parents, Family and Consumer Science Teachers, Science and Health teachers need updating about

- A. Large scale food processor product development directions toward nutraceuticals and their promotion of patented food parts.
- B. The value of regional fresh or frozen and processed whole food products in meeting the nutritional needs of today's consumer.

“Hometown” Food Clubs:

4. There needs to be more than a website to educate consumers about local foods. We plan on creating “Hometown Food Clubs” facilitated by student, retiree or nutrition professionals. As a member of a club, consumers interested in buying our food can also access farm fresh foods, dairy products, eggs, whole grain breads, and prepared gourmet sauces from small-scale food processors. Monthly gatherings of club members will be fun, focusing on connecting to farmers; food; agriculture and nutrition knowledge and neighbors. This is one place where consumers can participate in new product selection and can request creation of new products with their own ethnic twist. An email hometownfoodclub@berk.com connects consumers to a company interested in meeting their nutritional needs. Membership controls growth—matching production to orders. Orders will be placed through an internet website: www.farmtocity.com/HometownFoodClub.asp (See Appendix C). We will organize a pilot project in the surrounding area as soon as our nutrition education site www.ourhometownfoods.com is connected to our host ordering site.

Twelve voluntary monthly gatherings will be designed by a dietitian acquainted with seasonal farming and Hometown Foods, LLC to

- Provide consumer and nutrition education (comparing health and food cost of regional foods and grocery store foods)
- Organize farm visits, pot luck dinners or picnics
- Set up harvest excursions and family cooking workshops
- Provide time for trust to grow
- Identify leaders and work out the kinks in a new idea.

8. Continued nutrient analysis:

We plan on continuing our nutrient analysis of local foods because our regional farm products are the “healthiest whole food” choice available. Our products use simple processing techniques—cutting, pureeing, blanching in boil-in bags, tray freezing, vacuum packaging—low tech processes with nutrient and farm retention pluses. Our ingredient lists are simple with recognizable whole food ingredients. Hometown Foods can be trusted to be safe and high in quality.

Today’s food scientists take our farm foods apart to make “functional nutraceuticals” that they claim are better than the original, farm-grown product. Large-scale processors get patents on taking farm food apart and selling these parts to other manufacturers. They make new concoctions that are advertised to be “healthy”. This extra processing makes their products more expensive than our

products, especially when transportation, advertising and packaging costs are kept down and the store markup is eliminated.

(12.) Outreach

1. Display Board: Duplicate Hometown Foods in Your Community (See Appendix D)

We created a display board, titled "Duplicate Hometown Foods in Your Community" for the March 23, 2005 NY Nutrition Concerns Conference. Our mission was to sell ideas that others could duplicate after training. Many nutrition professionals looked through the printed pages of our website (www.ourhometownfoods.com) and were pleased to see serving sizes for children listed on the nutrition pages. They were intrigued by the 2005 referenced antioxidant information and the link to the world's healthiest food website www.whfoods.com that was included. We are having a table at the May 6th, 2005 NY Dietetics Association Conference in Saratoga, NY.

2. NY Small Scale Food Processors

We plan on working with the Small Scale Food Processors Association by offering them a chance to analyze their own products on our computer inexpensively so they can bring awareness to their consumers about the nutritional value of their whole food products. On April 2005, a SSFPA board meeting is planned at Hometown Foods, LLC in Kinderhook.

3. Display Board: Join a Hometown Food Club (See Appendix E)

At a NY Farms annual meeting in Voorheesville, NY on April 1, 2005, we set up a display along with samples. New York City Food Change nutritionists were interested in our recipe concepts about on whole foods innovation focused on palate change. Representatives of federal and state nutrition programs were interested also, WIC and Food Stamps. They will look into how food stamp recipients could participate in Hometown Food Clubs.

This display board will be used May 6th at the NY Dietetics Association meeting in Saratoga Springs. Here we will look for entrepreneurial dietitians and nutritionists interested in helping with our ideas and projects in NY's Capital District and Hudson Valley region.

4. Transparency Presentations: Join a Hometown Food Club! (See Appendix F)

We created and used a transparency to present our products and ideas to the

**Schenectady County Economic Development Center,
Hunger Action Network of Albany,
Schenectady County Cooperative Extension and to
Hamilton Hill community leaders.**

We will pursue their interests in seeing Hometown Foods, LLC work with them to create an agriculture related business in their community whether frozen food processing for area farms or for UPS distribution of regional fresh and frozen food products through internet ordering to the Capital District area—a substantial market..

We made a presentation to the Dutchess and Columbia County not-for-profit organization dedicated to marketing and distribution—the “Hudson Valley Fresh” Board of Directors and Advisory group. State legislator, Pat Manning is part of this group dedicated to distribution and marketing of regional food products. Bob Weybright, NECFE and a Hudson Valley Fresh advisory group member, is checking into a feasibility study based on Hometown Food ideas for the Capital District market.

- 4. Newspaper articles (Appendix G) will appear in Mid-Hudson Valley Health’s quarterly paper starting in May 2005 to reach health conscious consumers and health professionals whose patients might be interested in whole food products delivered to their door. Five other regional papers have received a copy for consideration**
- 5. In February 2005, the whole staff of Columbia County Cooperative extension paid a visit to the Hometown Foods kitchen and office to update their knowledge about what we are doing.**
- 6. Small fruit extension agent, Steven McKay of Columbia County, has invited Hometown Foods to share ideas and tastes of innovative fruit based products at a spring meeting April 11 of small fruit growers at Mike Biltonen’s Stoneridge Orchard in Ulster County, NY.**
- 8. As a result our company’s attendance at the Philadelphia SARE workshop to learn about their web ordering system www.farmtocity.com, a team from the Rodale Institute is planning a visit to attend a workshop.**
- 9. Seven culinary and nutrition teachers and professors were contacted for interns**

for other involvement in product development for their students using regional foods.

Goal 3

Deliver samples and learn how children, parents and day care providers react to the new products designed and sampled through this grant.

(4.) Participants and (5.) project activities

Two family day care settings and one large day care center were selected to receive adapted or new products designed by Hometown Foods, LLC for a month. There were 45 children and an equal number of students plus five staff members who sampled these products. Parents received samples to take home. Two evaluation questionnaires were designed (See Appendix A) for four products. Questionnaires were customized for parents and staff reactions. Staff reported the children's reactions. Individual samples were delivered to the center and the staff gave the samples to parents, tried some themselves and used the same food for the children the next day. Questionnaires were filled out and returned for pick up at the next delivery.

Hometown Foods, LLC created four new products for daycare sampling: four fruit breads containing soaked whole grains and seeds (Banana, Apple, Cranberry and Lemon Quick Breads); a low fat dairy product, non-oil based, Dilly Dressing for dipping steamed and fresh vegetables; and a gelatin based whole fruit snack with cottage cheese (Blueberry Cheese Snack). We provided a stir-fry meal also with no modification (Cajun Vegetable Cheese Medley) that uses one ounce of cheese per serving. Later in the fall we created two vegetable soup kits using frozen cooked beans as an ingredient to provide fiber (Butternut Squash Chowder and Cheesy Pumpkin). These were not given out for sampling but will be available in the future.

Other product sampling took place at a town Youth Fair and at four play groups (Smoothies made from frozen fruit sauce). Dilly Dressing was sampled at the September Primary School and Elementary open houses.

6. Results

Day care providers, parents and children of all ages loved the fruit sauce based products. The smoothies were a big hit, with youngsters coming back for refills. Day care providers appreciated the quick preparation time for the stir-fry and the fact that the spice packet was separate so the children could have a mild taste and the adults could have a strong taste. Vegetable pieces were easy to pick up for the children's finger food eating style. Dilly Dressing was a hit with everyone too—especially with the organic cucumber slices and mini carrots. Frozen broccoli did not work and zucchini slices were not a hit. The quick breads were a tasty snack—

adaptable as a birthday cake treat. Although some children did not like the raisins in lemon bread and picked them out.

Taste, nutrition, cost, recognizable ingredients and lack of preservatives were attributes important to the staff and parents. Both parents and staff preferred mixing conventional ingredients with organic to keep the price down. They liked the nutrition labels on the packages. Daycare would be interested in buying frozen meal kits and nutritious snacks. Parents were especially interested in the meal kits.

"Hometown" food product costs can be kept reasonable by

- 1. Limiting the amount of meat provided—4 oz. per 16 ounces of vegetables**
- 2. Using low cost cottage cheese as a protein source--\$1.50 per pound**
- 3. Using expensive hard cheeses as flavorings in appropriate serving sizes—one oz. per serving**
- 4. Making purees at peak of harvest from the ripest fruits**
- 5. Combining expensive frozen berry puree with lower cost fruit purees—blueberries and rhubarb; red raspberries with peaches; plums with rhubarb and grape concentrate; cranberries and peaches for fruit sauces**
- 6. Adding inexpensive and nutritious soaked, pressure-cooked and frozen beans to soups and meal kits to increase protein, fiber and antioxidants in "meal kit" products.**
- 7. Using soaked and cooked whole grains in bread products or as an inexpensive cereal to boost nutritional contributions to day care diets low in fiber and other nutrients lost in processing such as manganese**
- 8. Freezing regional vegetables in convenient form would increase consumption of rhubarb, fennel, acorn squash, and celeriac for example.**

The youngest children were the easiest to please. They will try anything. Older children are more picky. Older children may need to be involved in the cooking and offered new foods more times before liking the food. Consequently, having parents serve the same foods at home would be beneficial for real palate change.

Many day care providers believed parents of young children were not concerned with the nutritive value of the food eaten by themselves or their children.

I believe that many products in the grocery store offer poor nutritional choices for parents and exposure to easy to prepare Hometown Foods at gatherings may change their eating choices.

Food evaluation questionnaires were returned judiciously the first two weeks. The returns were low for the last two weeks. Providers were too busy to assist with distribution of food, newsletters and evaluation forms to parents at dismissal time.

Delivery of food to day care sites was difficult due to our small staff.

(9.) Assessment—new ideas generated

Frozen product production needs:

There is a need for production of large amounts of fresh and frozen “Hometown” foods for daycare centers and parents. A regional center for processing regional fresh fruits and vegetables into convenient fresh products is currently being contemplated in central NY along the thruway. Perhaps the Hudson Valley and Capital District farmers can create a regional freezing facility where frozen and vacuum packaged larger amounts (30 or 40 lb.) could be produced. Small scale processing kitchens like ours could then repackage the foods into smaller amounts for families and small group feeding sites.

Repackaging already frozen produce could easily be done in any Agriculture and Markets approved kitchen. Don Downing of the Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship in Geneva, NY reviewed our processes and informed the Ag. & Mkts. kitchen inspectors that vacuum packaging frozen food is a safe procedure requiring no scheduled process. Frozen vegetables are a great improvement over acidified canned foods. More vegetables can be frozen than canned currently.

United Natural Foods already provides quantities of frozen organic vegetables and fruits flash frozen but not vacuum packaged. Albert’s organics provides 25 lb. to 50 lb. quantities of fresh organic produce that can supplement the seasonal Northeast harvest. Some of our regional fresh vegetables could be frozen, especially vegetables normally not processed for store sales. The northeast produces a variety of fruits and vegetables that could be frozen from May to November and repackaged all year round for distribution.

Delivery and ordering:

Understanding the time limitations faced by busy working parents and day care providers and the limitations facing producers regarding delivery, Hometown Foods owner, Anna Dawson, attended a Philadelphia SARE sponsored web ordering workshop. Customers in Philadelphia visit www.farmtocity.org to order their winter harvest monthly but receive their orders weekly at group delivery sites.

We are currently placing our company's ordering information at our host website in Philadelphia. A template for our bi-weekly web pre-order system has been created (See appendix F). Weekly access, with year round delivery of regional fresh, frozen, baked, canned and dried foods would be accomplished using UPS for individual delivery or trucks for group delivery. We decided that a membership in a "Hometown" Food Club was necessary before being allowed to order. This will help us match production to consumer buying.

The Hometown Food Club will focus members' attention on regional food system and nutrition education. The clubs can organize visits to farms, have harvest excursions, and gather for tasting parties and potluck meals where the latest nutrition news can be provided by a facilitating nutritionist.

We decided that fresh "value added" produce products were important to offer for their nutritional value. For example, "apples with peel" provide more antioxidants than peeled apples in a cooked product. Also, since other small scale food processors and farmers face the same problems we face, we wanted to add some of their products and contact information to our ordering website. We will also expand our nutrition website www.ourhometownfoods.com to include agriculture and nutrition information about these product additions to our product list. We will work with farmers to create the web information needed by consumers so they are empowered buyers of local foods. This will be added to the nutrition and farm food education website.

We are exploring organizing a pilot "Hometown Food Club distribution project from our Kinderhook facility to a site in the Capital District and one in Schenectady. We will offer Hometown Food Club membership to day care providers and parents too. We are exploring weekly delivery to a school site too.

(10) Adoption:

We plan on adopting the changes we have made for delivery. We believe that parents who become members of a Hometown Foods Club would appreciate picking up orders at a nearby church or school before they pick up the children. We believe day care providers would like to pick up their orders after the children leave.

We are searching to find interns and employees from culinary programs in community colleges, vo-tec programs and college programs. We believe simple technology combined with a whole foods approach will succeed in providing healthy regional food choices. We will continue to create and market our frozen products.

(11) Outreach:

We attended the NY Farms annual meeting, April 2, 2005 in Voorheesville with

- 1. Our display board "Join a Hometown Food Club"**
- 2. A printed copy of pages from our proposed bi-weekly web ordering site**
www.farmtocity.com/HometownFoodClub.asp.
- 3. A brochure describing the Hometown Foods Club (See Appendix H)**
- 4. A catalog of Hometown Foods, LLC frozen and vacuum packaged products**
(See Appendix I)

NYSAWG saw our display and is interested in our ideas. We are sharing with farmers and food processors, extension personnel, Regional Farm and Food Project in Albany, Hunger Action Network of Albany, Cornell's Nutrition Department connected to "Farm to School", economic development people in Schenectady and Columbia County, churches, newspapers, Columbia County Healthy Heart schools and more. Outreach to the consumer who wants to eat well is top priority.

Summary:

Finding a year round market for small scale processed regional canned, dried, fresh or frozen and vacuum packaged foods was the purpose for exploring small feeding venues of families and community groups.

The method used was to step into the childcare world to see the problems of food providers through observations, interviewing, and food sampling. We found that food providers wanted to buy our healthy convenience foods when the offerings included frozen and vacuum packaged meal kits, fruit snacks, soups, whole grain breads and fresh produce. Easy ordering, reasonable prices, and high quality foods delivered nearby are pluses that add value and meet food providers' needs.

Marketing with updated nutrition knowledge on a product website intellectually educates while membership in a Hometown Foods Club builds trust between participants in a regional food system. Here community nutrition educators facilitate club gatherings and activities connected to local farms, processors, neighbors and food. Club member pre-ordering balances production with demand so the system can grow carefully. Health conscious consumers can access the same system in the future from work sites, schools, senior centers or directly through health professionals where prevention of future health problems is a priority. A business plan is being created to continue this project in the near future.

Anna Dawson