

SARE Final Report 23 May 1998

SARE FNE-97-183

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1. Goals of the Project: Desired End Result - To determine the feasibility of establishing for Vermont organic meat and poultry producers (and potential producers) a location(s) dedicated toward processing, marketing and distribution of their product. To determine the feasibility of a year-round dedicated outlet to sell their product. To assist the process for producers to increase production, begin to meet the demands within Vermont while at the same time create additional jobs for Vermonters.

2. Farm Update since receiving a farmer/grower grant: No change to the farm information from time of receiving grant.

3. Collaborators:

Robert P. Sheehan
finance tabulations and results, Role: Assisted with research, data collection,

Swallow Quick Farm: Role: Provided work station area, computer access.

Iroquois Custom Poultry Role: Served as Subject Matter Expert for custom
and retail poultry processing business (job, responsibilities, work hours, rules and
regulations, inspections, etc.)

Green Mountain Meats Role: Served as Subject Matter Expert for custom
and retail meat processing business (job, responsibilities, work hours, rules and
regulations, inspections, etc.)

NOFA-VT Role: Consultant provided data on organic farmers,
and assisted with information dissemination.

Women's Ag Network Role: Consultant, provided access to agricultural
information, meetings and workgroups

Ron Krupp Role: Consultant, provided access to agricultural
information, meetings and workgroups

4. List of events:

a. First event was to survey all organic growers, and determine the feasibility of growth in the organic meat producing business. Survey was very successful, and did determine potential growth if the goals of this grant were realized.

b. Second event was to conduct random surveys on small, medium and large retail markets on random routes throughout Vermont to determine desire to sell Vermont organic meat products. Survey was successful, and did determine a great potential for retail markets if the goals of this grant were realized.

c. Third event was initiated and canceled. This event was to survey small, medium and large restaurants to determine desire to sell Vermont organic meat products. Event was cancelled due to initial results of survey. Initial results determined that most all desired to feature Vermont organic meat products, however it was determined early on, even if the goals of this grant were realized, supply would not meet demand. End result would simply be to cultivate small sales to high profile restaurants, or cultivate a series of restaurants within a close proximity of each other to feature food products from all retail meat cuts of the animal carcass. (Example: Every restaurant contacted would like to include Vermont Lamb on menu. However, chefs only wanted the loin chops. What to do with the remainder of the cheaper cuts remains a problem.) Chef education is warranted.

d. Fourth Event was to participate in the Waterfront Market planning by serving on the Steering Committee and the Agricultural Committee. The purpose of participating in the event was to actively cultivate a relationship between the Burlington Farmer's Market, and the Waterfront Market, serving as year round outlet for Vermont organic meat producers. This location was chosen for its large upper income population, close proximity to a large amount of gourmet and standard restaurants, and close proximity to educational resources.

e. Fifth event was to determine how existing processing plants could meet the needs for organic producers and/or potential producers.

5. Findings and Accomplishments:

Finding # 1: I determined that without a dedicated processing, marketing and distribution effort for Vermont organic meat products, the industry will **never** grow beyond individual efforts. Supply will remain sporadic and seasonal. Supply will never meet demand, and individual efforts to grow will prove futile.

Finding # 2 (from retail markets). Organic is not all that important with most retailers. Although most retailers would sell organic meat products if the price difference was not that great. What is more important is that the meat is produced in Vermont. Local meat is a big seller with many retail customers **only for the fact that customers believe it is fresher than other imported/shipped meats.**

Finding # 3. Marketing of organic meat products in Vermont is **extremely poor.** Word of mouth is the preferred method for producers. Consumers desiring organically produced meat consider themselves lucky to find an organic producer/retailer (finding

taken from interviews with customers at Burlington Farmers Market, and results or organic survey.)

Finding # 4: With proper producers protocol, labeling and partial quality control completed and approved, most Vermont State or Federal Processing Plants can process carcasses for a dedicated effort. However, location of processors is limited throughout Vermont and may pose a problem for a statewide dedicated effort. Poultry processors are severely lacking in the State.

Accomplishment # 1: Organic producer survey completed. Indicated potential for growth in the organic meat production.

Accomplishment # 2: Retail market survey completed. Indicated potential for outlets for retail cuts of organic meat.

Accomplishment # 3 Served on committees to establish the Waterfront Market and a dedicated outlet for Vermont organic meat producers.

Accomplishment # 4: Served as the Vice President for the Burlington Farmer's Market, and assisted local meat producers with label, protocol and retail distribution.

Accomplishment # 5: Completed analysis of processors in Vermont.

Accomplishment # 6: Studied cost of building and equipping a state inspected processing facility.

Accomplishment # 7: Through outreach program, established an interest in the dedicated effort for processing, marketing and distribution of lamb in Vermont.

6. Specific site information relevant to project or the results. None

7. Economic findings relevant to project:

a. Lack of inspected processing plants throughout Vermont, specifically poultry, will hamper growth in the organic meat business. To sell retail cuts of meat, the entire process (slaughter to packaging) must be inspected (with all protocol, quality control and labeling in place.) A lack of properly placed inspected facilities (specifically north, central and south of State) will hamper growth. (Example: The existing inspected poultry facilities are located in the North Central/Central part of the state. There is no profit margin for a producer in the Southern part of the state to raise poultry and ship it to the existing inspected plants.)

b. Producers outside an acceptable commuting (45-60 minutes maximum) range of inspected facilities must use custom or "on-farm" processing facilities. Although custom processing can be just as safe and sanitary as inspected facilities (depending on the

processor), the producer can only sell the cuts "on-farm." In addition, an investment of approximately \$75,000.00 required to build a complete on-farm processing facility (minimum state inspected-includes equipment and waste disposal).

c. Lack of processing facilities creates an escalating problem; (1) Vermont producers fail to realize profits and drop or discontinue production, (2) Production of Vermont meats (including what is a diversified business for Vermont dairy farmers) declines, and out of state/country imports are increased to meet demands. (3) Open pasture land goes unproductive.

d. The state of Vermont (Vermont Department of Agriculture) current main emphasis is on Dairy and Specialty Foods. Limited emphasis on the lack of processing facilities will encourage the decline of Vermont meat producers.

8. Next Step:

a. Work towards a partnership with three processing plants (north, central, south) to process Vermont meat products.

c. Work to develop increased support from the State of Vermont (Vermont Department of Agriculture and our State House/Senate members) for dedicated processing plants for future growth.

d. Improve marketing through professional services. Vermont farmers remain visible and upfront.

e. Develop a protocol, partial quality control and label for all Vermont meat producers.

9. Will I continue the practice investigated. Yes, this project will not stop with the completion of the grant. The project will continue to go forward until 100% of stated goals are met.

10. Project and project results to other producers. I tell them about my SARE grant, (surprising at how many producers do not know about SARE) and the goals I have established. I also tell them to be patient (I do this in my spare time, I have to work off-farm to keep my place going as well). The results tell me there is a market and a demand. Vermont farmers must continue to produce the supply.

11. Outreach program:

a. Used the Agricultural Committee for the Waterfront Market to talk about marketing, production and distribution issues with other agricultural producers interested in a dedicated, year-round outlet. Presented issues to the Burlington community concerning Vermont farmers (buy local, eat seasonal) Presented a slide briefing to the

Burlington Community on the need for a year round market, and what Agricultural Producers needs were.

b. Participated in the Sheeposium as a panel member. Spoke to Vermont Sheep Producers about a dedicated effort for marketing, processing and distributing Vermont produced meat/poultry , and how it could answer marketing problems with sheep producers.

c. Maintain contact with Vermont organic meat producers through phone, meetings, and workshops. Continue to share development of Vermont Range, and gather new data facing producers.

d. Used booth at Burlington Farmer's Market to reach Senators (spoke with Senators Leahy and Congressman Sanders) about project and needs of Vermont meat producers.

e. Send copies of the Grant Results (minus most attachments) to Senators from rural/agricultural areas of Vermont.

f. Send copies of Grant Results to NOFA Vermont and ask if they will include all (or portion) of results in NOFA Newsletter.