

DAIRY FARM DIVERSIFICATION PROJECT
FINAL REPORT

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The goal of the Dairy Farm Diversification Project was to establish a commercially successful vegetable crop that could be grown during Maine's short growing season and marketed as a cooperative.

Three varieties of squash were raised as well as pumpkins:
50% buttercup, 15% delectata and 15% butternut;
20% pumpkins rounded out the selection grown
in 2-acre lots at three dairy farms.

The process of forming a cooperative and finding markets for the produce was a learning experience. The farmers ended up with a successful growing season despite the very poor weather we had in Maine this past summer. The unusually high levels of rain and accompanying cold weather were hard on most garden operations and squash was in short supply.

The dairy farmers were able to guarantee a dependable supply of quality squash and it is expected that the buyers will be return customers.

The buttercup variety of squash produced the biggest yield at about 14,000 lbs. per farm, butternut at 3,000 lbs., 3,000 lbs. delectata and approximately 300 pumpkins were harvested at each farm. The growers noticed a better response than expected for the less familiar variety of delectata by customers and each farm did well selling their produce right at their farm. The bulk of the produce was sold to the local IGA supermarkets and only about 5-6,000 lbs. of squash per farm had to be stored at the end of the harvest. Although a buyer had been lined up to purchase all that was left, there were problems with storage and the squash just did not last long enough to get it to market before spoilage became a problem. That remaining part of the crop had to be disposed of and effected the final profits for the season.

Each grower was able to cover their expenses and the group agreed to apply the remaining profits toward the purchase of a mulch layer and lifter and plastic, etc. for the coming year's crop needs.

The project as a whole has been a good educational demonstration of how farmers can form a cooperative and diversify their operations to increase their farm income.

The harvest did not amount to the expected economic returns that was hoped for, but all those who participated plan to continue with the project and more farmers are expected to join

as well. Growers are also considering adding other vegetable varieties that could be planted with the same equipment.

After going through the initial growing season the farmers have found that they need more technical information on storage methods. They are looking into innovative ways to store squash successfully as well as other marketing and utilization options.

All in all the project had a successful first year and received a great deal of news coverage. The Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District, University of Maine Cooperative Extension and the Time and Tide Resource Conservation and Development were helpful in lending technical support and their help is counted on for the program in the future.

OK

J. Gaudin

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