Growing Farm-to-Institution Market Opportunities: Targeted Technical Assistance and Outreach for Small and Medium Farmers

Community Alliance with Family Farmers of Davis, CA received $54,439 to provide technical assistance, education, and outreach to Sacramento Valley, Central Coast, and Humboldt small and medium size producers participating at farmers markets. Funds were used to assist producers in gaining access to the local institutional food service markets.

Final Report

Farmers Market Promotion Program
Agreement No. 12-25-G-0691

Final Report

Growing Farm to Institution Market Opportunities: Targeted Technical Assistance and Outreach for Small and Medium Farmers
September 2008 through March 2010

1. Summary of the issues or problem being examined

Growing Farm to Institution Market Opportunities: Targeted Technical Assistance and Outreach for Small- and Mid-sized Farmers addressed challenges concerning the direct and efficient supply of locally sourced fresh produce to large institutional kitchens and foodservice operators in three regions of California. Small- and mid-sized farmers who are interested in accessing the growing (and lucrative) demand of foodservice operators for locally grown foods lack the information and infrastructure to connect with these large buyers. Simultaneously, foodservice and institutional customers do not have information regarding regional availability/seasonality, and struggle to identify large and consistent sources of high quality local produce. These issues impede sales of small- and mid-sized farms to large food buyers, which are often just a few hours away from where the product is grown.

2. Descriptions of how the issues or problem was addressed

This project addressed direct sale challenges in three regions of California, each with local food distribution networks in various stages of development. The first phases focused on outreach, education, and technical assistance to growers in the Sacramento Valley, Central Coast, and Humboldt County. In each area, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) contacted growers, provided educational materials with tips on working with institutional and other customers (Attachment 6b), food safety requirements (6a, also available in Spanish), and a suite of personalized marketing materials including illustrated farmer profiles (1,2,3). CAFF presented workshops in each region, which focused on selling to institutional markets, direct marketing (2e), wholesale packing requirements, and food safety (6a). Growers in the Sacramento Valley interested in working with the Growers Collaborative, a local food distributor affiliated with CAFF, were asked to complete sustainability surveys and food safety self-audits. CAFF gathered seasonality information in each area and consulted with designers to create colorful charts outlining each growing region's product availability by month (3).

The next phase focused on working with foodservice and institutional kitchens to develop local food purchasing programs. For these institutions and businesses, CAFF provided educational materials including tip sheets for sourcing and serving locally procured foods (7), menu planning, seasonality charts (3), as well as marketing and educational tools for their end customers (1). CAFF coordinated farm tours in each location for foodservice staff (5) and provided technical assistance to coordinate fresh

and local produce deliveries from the Growers Collaborative (GC) or other partner farmers and distributors.

The last phase of the program was focused on assessments in the form of quarterly reports, surveys, and analysis of sales data.

3. Specific contributions of project partners

CAFF regularly works with a wide variety of collaborators, project partners, supportive businesses and non-profit organizations.

In Humboldt, CAFF worked closely with the North Coast Growers Association (NCGA) who manages various farmers markets in the area. NCGA supplied valuable grower contacts and collaborated on events and outreach activities. Humboldt State University was also an enthusiastic partner in developing their local sourcing program for their cafeterias.

In the Sacramento Valley, the Health Education Council of West Sacramento was essential in providing farmer contacts and introductions as well as translation services, which allowed CAFF to work with Hmong and Mein immigrant growers in the Valley. The Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioners office assisted in connecting CAFF with farmers for the program. CAFF collaborated with Soil Born Farms and the UC Davis Cooperative Extension on a survey of growers in the Valley that included questions related to food safety and product availability. The Growers Collaborative, which was a local food hub and distribution program at CAFF for the first year of this project, was a crucial component of CAFF's work in the Sacramento Valley. GC facilitated direct sales from Valley and some Central Coast growers to institutional purchasers within the Sacramento and Bay Area. In September 2009, a private distribution business took over the daily operation of GC in the Bay Area. CAFF continues to be a close partner of the Growers Collaborative in the Bay Area and recently completed negotiations with business partners to open similar aggregation hubs in Sacramento and Los Angeles. Produce distributor SF Specialty was key in organizing our tour of Riverdog Farm for foodservice professionals from Bon Appétit Management Company.

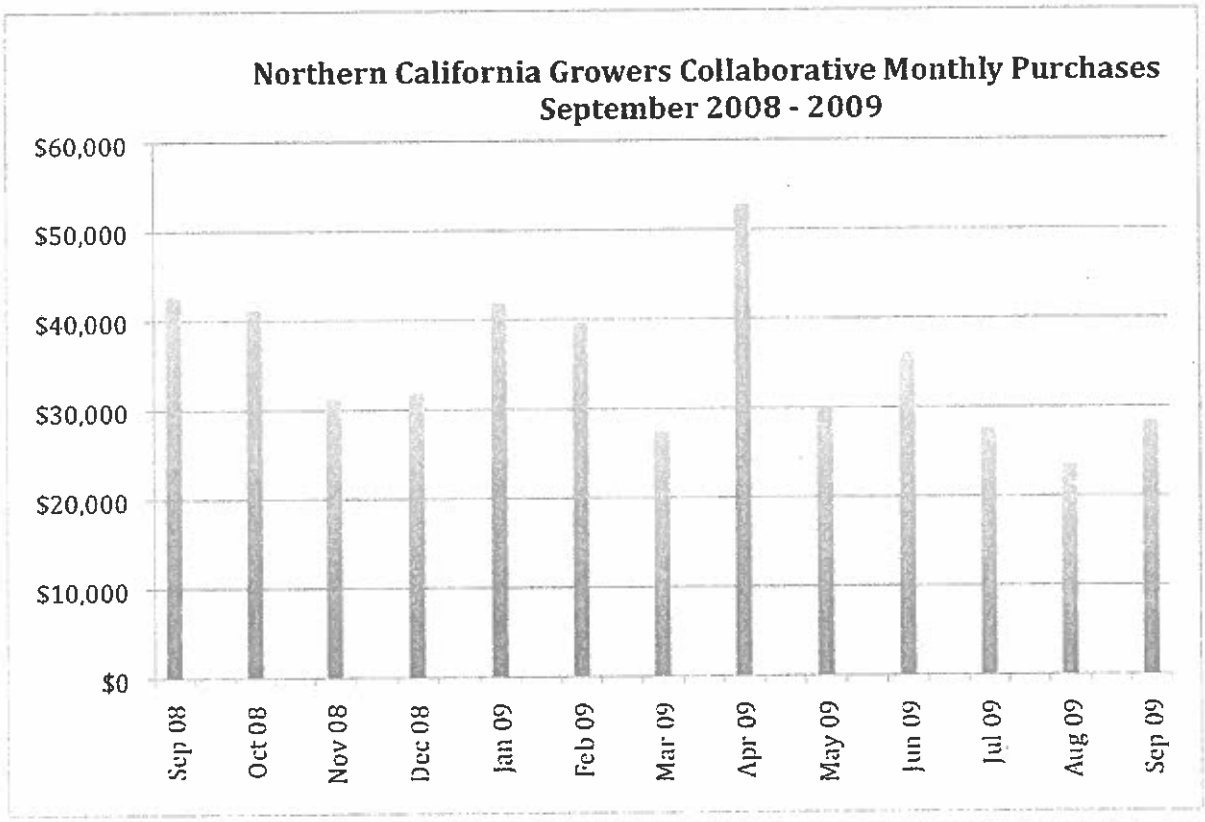
In the Central Coast CAFF collaborated with ALBA Organics to organize events, connect with farmers, as well as provide distribution services to local foodservice operations. CAFF's Farm to School Program consulted with school districts throughout the Central Coast and Bay Area to develop local food sourcing and Harvest of the Month programs.

4. Results, Conclusions, and Lessons Learned

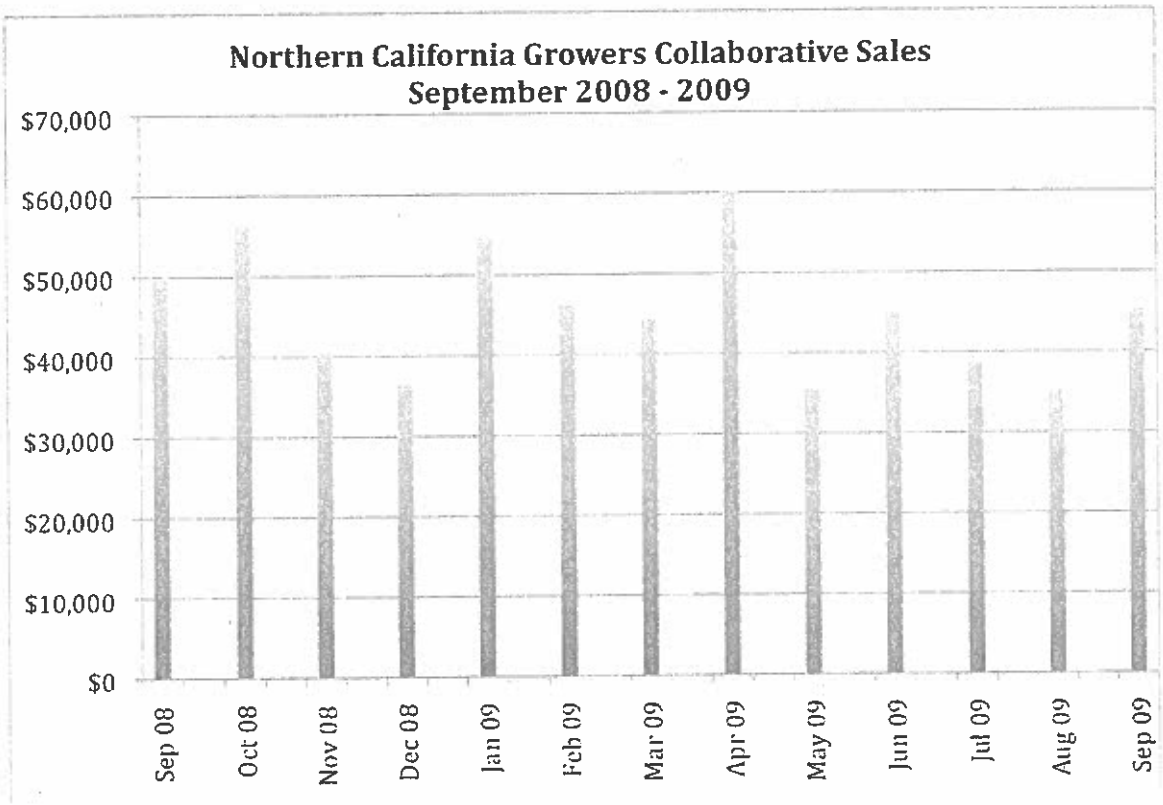
The project supported a variety of activities crucial to the development of local food networks and programs in the Central Coast, Sacramento Valley, and Humboldt County. Growers of small- and mid-sized farms are interested in finding new customers for their products who can order large volumes and maintain their unique farm identity for prices that value their commitment to sustainable growing practices.

Our outreach efforts and educational materials reached over 200 farmers in the Central Coast, Humboldt and Sacramento Valley. While CAFF directly managed

Growers Collaborative through September 2009, over 50 farmers regularly sold through this new outlet for their products (8a). In Humboldt, over 15 farmers were connected with institutional buyers, 10 of them selling directly to Humboldt State University. In the Central Coast, farmers were connected with Alba Organics, a local food distribution business, as well as hundreds of classrooms through the Harvest of the Month Program (7e).



Throughout the grant period, CAFF conducted outreach to over 45 institutions and other foodservice providers. Over half of these initiated or expanded local purchasing programs as a direct result of our efforts. After surveying 65 restaurants about their food needs, the CAFF Humboldt office helped coordinate regular deliveries directly from farmers to 11 area restaurants. Sacramento and Bay Area foodservice operators and institutions bought an average of over $45,000 per month of locally sourced food through the Growers Collaborative from September 2008 – 2009 (8b). During this project, Berkeley Unified School District committed to purchasing $13,000 worth of locally sourced produce over the following school year. Kaiser Permanente's Sustainable Food Program Manager Kathleen Reed states CAFF's assistance was "helped us to understand and quantify the impact of a sustainable purchasing program on farms and farmers and the progress Kaiser was making towards our goals" (Phone conversation 6/28/10). Katie Appel, Specialty Buyer and Coordinator for Fresh Point (a produce distributor), also commented positively in an email stating, "Buy Fresh Buy Local marketing materials, in particular the farmer profiles, have proven to be very successful tools to promote CAFF, local farms and their stories." (email 6/29/10).



Driven by customers' demand for locally grown produce, local purchasing programs continue to grow among large food service buyers and their distributors. Local purchasing has moved past being only a trend and is becoming the status quo for large food service companies. For example, the Compass Groups, which manages 10,000 foodservice accounts in the US, recently announced a companywide 10 percent local purchasing program. While many distributors in California already purchase locally, some still struggle to connect and source from small- and mid-sized local growers in an efficient and profitable manner. In this environment, CAFF and the Growers Collaborative, which now has working local food hubs in the Bay Area, Sacramento and Los Angeles, have vital roles to play in providing technical assistance, conducting outreach to farmers, and coordinating product aggregation (to enable large buyers to connect their customers directly with small- and mid-sized local farmers).

5. Current or Future benefits to be derived from the project

Outreach to both foodservice buyers and farmers had a lasting effect on both parties and, in numerous cases, helped to build lasting relationships between producers and buyers. Examples of this can be seen in each of the project regions. In Humboldt, farmers continue to make deliveries to Humboldt State University, and the foodservice staff are now familiar and committed to local purchasing. In the Central Coast, dozens of

school districts began local food programs of various sizes and are increasingly connected both to local food networks as well as the growing national community of Farm to School Programs. In the Bay Area, the Growers Collaborative continues to expand under new management, and is now reaching many more customers than its previous distribution model. With the addition of a Growers Collaborative Hub in Sacramento, the potential for local farmers to tap into new institutional and foodservice markets continues to improve.

6. Additional Information available (publications, websites, pictures)

Attachments:

1. Farmer Profiles
    a. Churchill Orchards
    b. Fairview Gardens
2. Buy Fresh Buy Local Marketing
    a. Central Coast Poster
    b. Central Coast Bumper Sticker
    c. Farmer of the Month Poster
    d. Full Size Farmer Cutouts – Humboldt
    e. Local Marketing Presentation
3. Seasonality Charts
    a. Humboldt County
    b. Sacramento Valley
    c. Central Coast
4. Asian Specialty Vegetables
    a. Guide
    b. Seasonality Chart
5. Farm Tour Photographs
    a. Tim Mueller of Riverdog Farm (Sacramento Valley)
    b. South Asian Vegetable Survey Results
    c. Humboldt Farm Tour
    d. Farm Tour Survey Results
6. Grower Workshops
    a. Food safety and Pack Guide
    b. Pro/Con Marketing Guide
    c. Alba Organics
    d. Sacramento Strawberry Meeting
7. Institutional Purchasing Guides
    a. Hospital Available at:
    www.caff.org/publications/web_hospitals_report.pdf
    b. College Guide Available at:
    www.caff.org/publications/BuildingLocalFoodProgamsonCollegeCampus.pdf
    c. School Guides Available at:
    www.caff.org/publications/FTS_parentguide_caff_web.pdf
    d. Institutional Tip Sheet and also available at:
    www.caff.org/publications/TipsforInstitutionalBuyers.pdf
    e. Harvest of the Month Program

8. Quick Books Data for Northern Growers Collaborative
   a. Farm Purchasing Sep 2008-09
   b. Institutional Sales Sep 2008-09
9. Growers Collaborative Availability Sheet August 2009
10. Press
    a. Times Standard, "A Growing Market" 9/13/09
    b. Washington Post, "Farm to Hub to Table: New Nonprofit Feeds Appetite For Local Food" 8/26/09
    c. Oakland North, "Farm to School' allies plan healthy food campaign" 1/29/10

7. Recommendations for future research needed, if applicable N/A

8. Contact person for the project

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9. Description of the people, organizations, marketing entities and/or communities that have benefitted from the project's accomplishments

Farmers in particular benefitted from this project, including all those who sold and continue to sell through the Growers Collaborative (95 of these farmers are listed in attachment 8a). Minority farmers in the Sacramento Valley (specifically Hmong and Mien strawberry growers) and the Central Coast (who originated from Mexico) were able to gain new markets, profiles, marketing materials, and direct technical assistance. Farmers in Humboldt, a few of whom were mentioned in an article on our activities there (10a), have traditionally been limited to selling small volumes at farmers markets, and were greatly assisted by project activities.

This project also educated institutions (schools, hospitals, etc), about the importance of buying fresh, local food. As a result, community members of Humboldt County, Sacramento Valley and the Central Coast will benefit from this project every time they eat local produce at one of the institutions involved in this project. With the help of FMPP, CAFF implemented new ways of buying and selling local produce, and helped to build sustainable relationships between producers and buyers within each community.