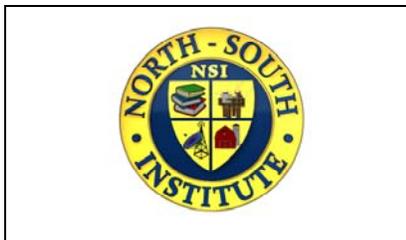


## **Implementation of a Regional Farmer to Consumer Direct Marketing Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Beginning Farmers in Florida and Alabama**

The **North-South Institute** of Davie, Florida received \$100,000 to begin a new Community Sustainable Agriculture program, and provide equipment and other infrastructure to create four roadside stands for low-income and beginning farmer cooperatives and other small farmer groups in Florida and Alabama.

[Final Report FY09](#)



### **Farmers Market Promotion Program Final Performance Report**

Recipient Name: North-South Institute, Inc. (“NSI” or the “Institute”)

Title of Project: Implementation of a Regional Farmer to Consumer Direct Marketing Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Beginning Farmers in Florida and Alabama

Project End Date: September 28, 2011

Grant Number: 1225G0924

Location: Florida and Alabama

Contact Name &  
Telephone Number: Dr. Samuel Scott – 954-434-8220

### **a. Project Summary.**

In order to implement a regional farmer to consumer direct marketing program for socially disadvantaged farmers and beginning farmers, the Institute assisted four cooperatives at various stages of development and one roadside stand was selected in Florida and the bordering counties of Alabama.

The key issue addressed by this project was expanding the capacity of these farmers to produce and market directly selected products. We approached this issue through selection of a group of specialty crops grown by these farmers. These crops are callaloo/spinach, pumpkin (calabaza), hot peppers, thyme, okra, scallion, dasheen, tannia, lulu, pak choi tomatilla, specialty tomatoes, salad mix, honey, watermelon, southern peas, greens, and green beans and assorted Asian Vegetables.

The success of the project is measured by the following tracked results over the project period. In the first year, a group of producers in the Southwest Broward Vegetable Growers Association adopted the community supported agriculture (CSA) model and began direct marketing to local consumers, callaloo/spinach, mustard green, pumpkin (calabaza), hot peppers, thyme, okra, scallion, and honey. In addition, they cooperated and supported the formation of a weekend farmers market in the second year with the direct involvement of the Institute. This activity has now blossomed in a direct marketing food hub operating six (6) days per week supplying locally grown callaloo/spinach, bok choy, Chinese spinach, mustard green, cucumber, acorn squash, papaya, egg plants pumpkin (calabaza), hot peppers, thyme, okra, scallion, basil, mint, sugarcane and honey. In addition, farmers are provided with an on-site chill storage system where they are able to harvest and hold over products which are then sold by the producers directly to the neighborhood supermarkets, ethnic produce stores, as well as other metropolitan areas in Florida. The hub has also offered marketing services partner organizations in North-Central Florida, North Florida and Alabama.

*Wiregrass Cooperative* has been able to improve its roadside operation over the project period. Their advancement included an expansion of its youth summer program, and growing and distributing through their stands beans, peas watermelons, okra, tomatoes, corn, squash, cabbage and onions. They have expanded their merchandizing by building new produce bins and stalls, and purchase a chiller and merchandiser.

*Cottage House Women in Agriculture & Bullock Barber Famer Cooperative:* They were able build new produce bins and stall and purchase walk-in-cooler. They expanded their growing operation by adopting a local school gardening and youth summer project. They were able to market directly watermelon, cantaloupes, squash, tomato, cucumber, sweet corn and peas. However, in the second year production was severely hampered by the drought.

*Hill Top Roadside Stand and Newberry Development Outreach Cooperation:* On the production side, over the two growing seasons, they were able to cultivate and harvested

40 acres of watermelon, tomatoes, bell pepper, okra, and peas. These were market marketed through roadside stands. Infrastructural issues and change in strategy affected this collaboration.

Collaboration between the Florida Pond Farmers Cooperative and the New Panhandle Farmer Cooperative resulted in the cultivation and harvesting of over 100 acres of peas, butter bean, okra, squash, watermelons. Production in the second year was severally hampered by drought. Additionally, infrastructural issues and change in strategy also affected the two roadside stands.

### **b. Project Approach.**

The major approach used was providing technical assistance, training, extension outreach and guidance in the purchasing of equipment for the development each direct selling point.

In some areas, there were existing infrastructures that the group used. In other areas, there were major changes in the areas where the market stands could be located. This was done by the groups using their own resources.

In addition, due to group leadership, the implementation of strategies had to be changed over the course of the project, which slowed down the process for the groups in North-Central Florida and North Florida.

Perhaps one of the major limitations was the cost for some of the support equipment which we discovered was very high after the award. Several months were used to negotiate for lower costs. In the case of Alabama and South Florida, those groups increased their contributions from their resources to ensure the project was implemented.

The development of a Farmer Network and Food Consortium as well as clusters developed around lead farmers who would serve as mentors. Each cluster was encouraged to produce their main products and, where possible, distribute products to other groups within the network. For example, North Florida and Alabama producers of tomato and watermelon, after satisfying their local market, could trade with producers of hot peppers and calabaza in South Florida. This was difficult to accomplish due to several factors which will be highlighted in the following sections.

### **c. Goals and Outcomes Achieved.**

(a) Over a two year period assist Southwest Broward Cooperative in developing a Community Support Agriculture system. This goal was achieved by linking local consumers to purchase directly from key famers. Most farmers were more interested in selling directly to the farmers' marklet and to ethnic stores and supermarkets that serve the immigrant population. This currently supplies over 400 cases of nine (9) assorted types of produce per week to the local areas generating and estimated \$4,000 of income to the farming group.

(b) In two years, assist the Newberry Development Outreach Corporation (NDOC) and Hilltop Farms to expand its Roadside Stand operation in Newberry, Florida. Both entities have excellent infrastructure, the road side stand has expand its product line to include the sales of beans, water melons, tomatoes, squash and fire wood to local consumers. NDOC has implemented its plan to include working with a local church to expand its food marketing and the infrastructure.

(c) Over two years, assist the Florida Pond Farmers Cooperative (FPFC) to improve its Roadside Stand operation in Madison/Jackson, Florida. As stated in the proposal, this group is need of a management system, harvesting equipment, postharvest infrastructure and market display stalls and stands to improve their current road side stand operation. Given the state of the local leadership of FPFC, it was decided to link them into the market provided by the New Panhandle Farmers Cooperative the currently operate the farmers market. The major emphasis was on technical assistance and training provided to this group. The major items produced and marketed were southern peas and beans. For example in the two years, over two hundred acres of southern peas were produced and harvested by the farming groups, yield over 40 bushels per acre generating \$28 per bushel of income to the farmers

(d) Over two years, assist the Cottage House Women in Agriculture /Bullock-Barbers Farmers Association to improve its Roadside Stand operation in Bullock/Barber County, Alabama. This group was able to upgrade its operation through the technical assistance and training received. The roadside operation was upgraded into a seasonal community farmers market and postharvest infrastructure.

(e) Over two years, assist the Wire Grass Farmers Cooperative to improve its Roadside Stand operation in Geneva County, Alabama. This group was able to upgrade it operation through the technical assistance and training received. It expands its roadside operation and i8ncorrated a summer youth program producing cabbage, tomato, peppers, watermelons, peas and greens. The entity also upgraded its postharvest infrastructure.

The following shows the evaluation matrices and the summary results:

**Table 1. Summary Project Tracking Results**

Evaluation Criteria	Expected Outcome	Project Output	Results Realized (Accomplishments)
<p>(1) Number and timeliness of educational and outreach activities and (2) Perceptions of usefulness and applicability of information shared and instruction delivered during outreach and educational activities.</p>	<p>One CSA and Four Roadside Stands operating within the first Year of the project.</p>	<p>Business planning, record keeping, food safety and product handling marketing and management education.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Over 268 producers trained and participated.</li> <li>2. Consumers and Food market Linkage established.</li> <li>3. Two Farmers Market and Two Road Side Stands established and upgraded with support of local communities.</li> </ol>
<p>3) Number of clientele and participants in the programs.</p>	<p>Five major direct to consumer market outlets, and assortment of fruits and vegetables sold\ to consumers.</p>	<p>Education of 268 growers in implementing an integrated system of production and marketing of selected specialty through one CSA and four (4) roadside stands.</p>	<p>The food outlets were established. In the case of three these were developed to levels beyond what was expected.</p>
<p>(4) Number of farmers using the new technology packs, Best Management Practices, Good Handling Practices and Good Agricultural Practices.</p>	<p>268 farmers attached to the five groups trained in these areas and implementing the protocols.</p>	<p>Implementation of techniques in the production of selected varieties of specialty crops.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More than 268 Farmers participated in Two major symposium and four echo workshops, several listening sessions, and 1 on 1 meetings.</li> <li>2. Within the groups, the farmers grew and produced seasonally over 315 acres of produce.</li> </ol>
<p>(5) New Farmers attracted to the Program, Farmers' attitude to new ways to farming and marketing.</p>	<p>Additional farm clusters included with women and minority farmers included. Farmers in the program expand direct market in terms of increased volume of products sold and revenues generated.</p>	<p>Implementation of a farm mentor new immigrant and women farmers, and demonstration of practical tools and sustainable technologies to these farmers.</p>	<p>In all areas, new farmers were added into the program. In the case of Alabama, the South Alabama Famers Cooperative was added through the efforts of the targeted group. Some 15 farmers were added. In the case of South Florida the largest increase in new farmers were realized with</p>

			some 56 farmers added. Tracking results showed an increase in farmers income (see criteria #1)
<b>(6)</b> Increase Volume of produce sold through the marketing program.	Equipment purchased and completed system for the CSA and the Roadside Stands. Farmers in the program expand direct market in terms of increased volume of products sold and revenues generated.	Identification of the new an emerging ethnic groups and the foods they like. The expansion of the variety and volume of specialty crops for the diverse consumer market.	Equipment purchased that increased post harvest handling and the merchandizing of the produce. This allowed for significant volume of sales of produce.
<b>(7)</b> The level of farm income realized and <b>(8)</b> The level of profitability before and after the farm market program.	Equipment purchased and completed system for the CSA and the Roadside Stands. Farmers in the program expand direct market in terms of increased volume of products sold and revenues generated.	Provide requisite equipment, packaging material, stalls and other supplies to assist these groups in the harvesting, packing, postharvest handling and merchandizing.	Based on baseline done through support of other programs, it was shown that, on average, part-time farmers were earning \$7,000 - \$14,000 per year. Full-time farmers were earning just under \$46,000. With the implementation of the project the average income for part-time famers was about \$16,000 and fulltime around \$54,000.

#### **d. Beneficiaries.**

This project targets micro and small farmers operating both part time and full time. They are engaged in spatiality crops and small livestock. While there are independent farmers amounting to 40% of the target group, the remaining 60% are involved in local cooperatives, pre-cooperatives and community based organizations.

Those in cooperatives utilized the cooperative for their marketing services. Others used the established roadside stands for marketing. The farmers market allowed for increase participation. However, direct marketing to consumers, ethnic stores and small neighborhood supermarkets still dominated the bulk of the outlets for the products grown.

It is estimated that the project facilitated the production of 315 acres of products annually for the farmers involved with the implementation of the project the average income for part-time famers was about \$16,000 and fulltime around \$54,000.

Four of the market outlets can only operate for 7 months or 28 weeks. One outlet can operate for 40 weeks. Average returns after cost is estimated at \$200 per famer per week. It is estimated the outlets could results in future benefits of over \$ 900,000.

#### **e. Lessons Learned.**

The major lessons learn on this project included the following:

- 1) Local leadership must involve individuals that can motivate and attract the farmers who are interested in the farmers market.
- 2) While planning and working with other community entities, making decisions can take extended periods of time, which could result in farmers losing interest and overall loss of momentum in the project.
- 3) In developing a project, cost estimates may not match market prices within the project timeframe.
- 4) Farmers who opt to be vendors may drop out if weekly income from the market is not at a certain level.
- 5) Some producers they are driven by cash flow.
- 6) It may be wise for market leaders to be flexible in the operation of the market as farmers and vendors can change depending on the initial results of the market.
- 7) Ensure that farmers produce and sell items where there are not frequent self-competing situations.
- 8) Most consumers are willing to buy products if they are priced lower than what they can purchase these items for at the supermarkets.
- 9) Items are labeled *locally grown* (that are in fact, locally grown—not just based on assumption) will become hot selling items at the market or roadside stands.
- 10) Organic items are well in demand, but some consumers are not willing to pay the premium price for certified organic produce.

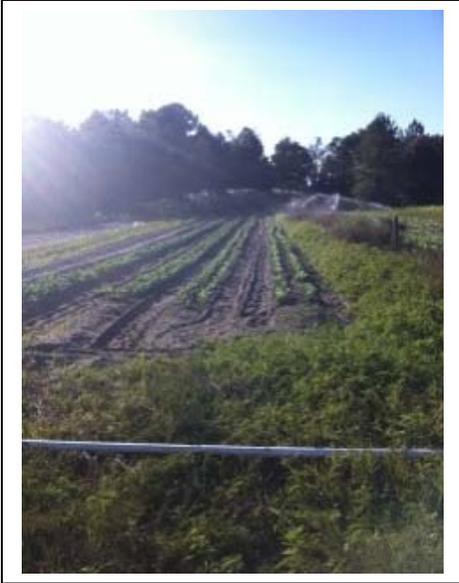
**f. Additional Information.**

The following shows major highlighted of the project to include:

- (1) Photographic records
- (2) Websites
- (3) Farm land cultivation provided by the partners.

## **Pictures for Farmers Market Final Report**

Alabama - Wiregrass Cooperative: Field Picture and Equipment for Roadside Stand Operation



Greens for the Market



Hot Peppers for the Market



Produce for the Market



Produce Cooler

Alabama – Cottage House Women in Agriculture and Bullock Barber Farmers Cooperative - Farmers Market Produce - received technical assistance, training and equipment.



**Southwest Broward Vegetable Growers Association: Field Pictures of Products for their CSA and Supply to Farmers Market in South Florida**

**Figures below: In the field – locally grown produce for farmers markets.**



Figures below: Farmers Market servicing SVBGA



**Additional Information**

**WEBSITE**

[www.newbattensfarmersmarket.com](http://www.newbattensfarmersmarket.com)

(Farmers market servicing Southwest Broward Vegetable Growers Association)

**PHOTOS OF THE FEATURED FARMERS MARKETS/PRODUCERS**

**New Panhandle Farmers Market serving the Florida Pond Farmers Cooperative - receiving technical assistance and training**



**Mells Delicious Food Processing and Packaging, LLC - received technical assistance for value added products marketed at roadside stand and farmers market in North Central Florida**



**Gillian: Hydroponics Vertical Green Farms for Roadside Stand in North-Central Florida**



**Hilltop Farm Roadside Stan Received Technical Assistance**

**g. Contact Persons.**

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