

Building a Grass-Fed Beef Production Infrastructure to Support Marketing and Serve Consumers

The Ohio's Small Farm Institute proposed to carry out a program to link grass-fed beef producers to farmers markets. The project will help grass-based beef producers market their products directly to consumers at farmers markets by conducting a series of workshops to identify strategies for production, processing, preparation, and marketing grass-fed beef products to meet farmer markets' demands for leaner, healthier cuts of meat through increased production of locally produced, grass-fed beef. With farmer workshops and creation of networking relationships with North Union Farmers Market of Cleveland, Ohio, the project will recruit farmers, form a farmer advisory group for building capacity in the grass-fed beef production supply chain, and create an added-value opportunity for the bull calves born on Ohio grazing farms.

[Final Report](#)

Farmers Market Promotion Program-2007

Project Title: Building A Grass-Fed Beef Production Infrastructure to Support Marketing and Serve Consumers' Demand

12-25-6-0586

Summary of the issue: The farmers markets have consumers interested in purchasing grass fed beef that is locally grown. Ohio has a number of grazing beef and dairy farmers who are not familiar with direct marketing especially farmers markets. The dairy farmers receive little to no value from their bull calves. Grazing dairy farms tend to use a smaller animal like Jerseys as graziers and they have less value than Holstein bull calves.

Description of how the issue was addressed: The demand for grass fed beef through farmers markets and the availability of dairy bulls in the Northeastern Ohio needed to be intersected. We pulled together a team to lay out the different steps that a farmer would have to address to direct market in a farmers market. Four workshops were framed around the different infrastructure issues that would be faced. Each workshop and field day was designed as "hands on" plus the opportunity to interact with the presenters and each other. *First workshop:* grazing beef and dairy farmers met to discuss producing grass fed beef. Benchmarks and goals were discussed and whether they would see themselves trying to access the farmers markets. They shared their barriers to direct marketing and raising grass-fed beef. From these observations, the team tailored the remaining workshops around their issues and concerns. Processing was major issue that emerged. Some were selling from the farm their beef but did not have a good understanding of how to create add value products. *Second workshop:* this session was on external issues of where to process, handling and transporting to butcher and to the market. The workshop covered determining the right cuts of meats, fabrication of meat cuts and how to talk with the butcher. A fabrication demonstration of cutting up a half of beef was given. They showed the various cuts of meats and talked about the different values and options in processing. During this session, different cuts of beef were cooked. Suggestions were shared on how a farmer might offer cooking techniques and types of cuts for various cooking methods. *Third workshop:* the workshop was at a dairy grazing farm. This combined one of the planned field trips with the discussion on "how to manage your pasture to finish beef ". The session shared how to produce quality meat and how meat was developed by the animal. The management practices of grasses, legumes, water source and other production resources were covered. The timing of calving and the age of animals for marketing and when an animal was considered "finished" was part of the discussion. *Fourth workshop:* This workshop introduced the participants to consumer interest and expectations as well as general marketing issues. The session had a demonstration on sensory impact of different products and different perceptions of consumers as to what is a high end product and how it is maintained. The concept of branding and how one might created a brand for the farm was explained. The participants learned additional information about cooking. They did taste comparisons based using standard sensory panel procedures. *Field trip:* This was a trip to Crocker Park, one of North Union Farmers Markets in Cleveland, Ohio. The participants talked with various farmers marketing at the market. Some of the marketers had meat products. Most of the meat marketers offered a combination of fruit and/or vegetables with their meat products. The farmers discussed the challenges and opportunities in this type of marketing.

Specific contributions of project partners: Parker Bosley, retired chef and farmer coordinator for North Union Farmers Market in Cleveland, Ohio area provided the insight and knowledge of what consumer at the North Union Farmers Market or other markets would want from the direct marketed product from the farmers. He recruited and trained farmers to become vendors for North Union Farmers Market. He demonstrated cooking techniques and types of cuts for various cooking methods during the second workshop. He introduced the participants to some of the vendors at the Crock Park Market during the field day to that farmers' market. Dr. Henry Zerby, Animal Science at Ohio State University, teaches products, food safety and quality and managing the meat science laboratory for OSU. Dr. Zerby taught

the workshop 2 on processing and working with butcher on products as well as the different added value product options and handling and safety issues for direct marketing meat. Dr. Paul Kuber, Animal Science at Ohio State University, teaches niche marketing, sensory panel testing and product development. Dr. Kuber taught the workshop 4 on consumer perception, interests and expectations; branding and niche markets. He demonstrated the differences in cooking and product with the sensory panel procedures having the workshop participants evaluated their experience with the different cooking methods and products. Dr. Francis Fluharty, Researcher at Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center/OSU, works with growth and development of beef; nutrition; the Ohio Signature Beef program and directs the Ohio Beef Industry Center. Dr. Fluharty discussed with the farmers in workshop 2 the affects of nutrition on meat quality and development stages of animals. He co-authored the notebook with Leah Miller and identified major sources of information for farmers. Leah Miller, director of Small Farm Institute, organized the field trips and the workshops as well as managed the grant components. She identified the potential participants for the grant and connected them with activities. All of the project partners worked with the development of the workshop curriculum and reviewed material in their area of interest and expertise for the notebook.

Results, conclusions and lessons learned: Most have not been at a farmers market. It was difficult to get the farmers to go to the farmers' market field day. We had 15 to 20 participants at most of the workshops. The survey was completed by five farmers. All raised grass fed beef. Four marketed their beef to others. One was direct marketing; one was interested in farmers marketing; and two were "maybe" for farmers marketing. The fifth one was selling off the farm and had not interested in farmers market. (The summary of the survey comments are attached.) The North Union Farmers Markets representative indicated that the greatest challenge was to help farmers sell the entire carcass. The easy to use cuts and popular items are easy to sell but short ribs, pot roasts and other items are more of a challenge. Many consumers do not purchase in large volumes at farmers markets. Parker Bosley observed that most of the farmers at market farmers have off farm jobs and that farmer's market day cuts into their farming time. The volume is not high enough for the time investment along with the lack of diverse product offerings so this becomes a barrier for the farmers and consumers. If the farmer does not have a consistent pattern of when they are coming to the market, consumers miss or lose interest. A hybrid model of farmers markets and CSA might be an option to be explored. The farmer would develop a packet of several different cuts with a set price for front or back. But the consumer would have option of picking up at farmer market locations once or twice month.

Two key lessons: the need for the farmers to want to market and understand the importance of their role in marketing if they are to capture the added benefit from additional dollars for them; the second issue is the inconsistency in the processing and identifying processors willing and able to do the detail work for direct marketing. *"There is an on- going interest in grass based production systems, both growing and finishing beef and lamb on forage based diets. Marketing is still the big hurdle for most farmers to climb. The time, cost, and risk is too high to start a direct marketing program equal to the production capacity of most farms. The other concern is the amount of time it takes to build a marketing base of customers. If there were established markets to buy grass produced animals, I think many producers would move that direction. Now it is like growing organic grain and selling it in the conventional commodity marketing system. I believe the markets will develop. We will see grass finished meat packing industry developing in time."*(from one of our farmers/presenters).

Marketing and trying to figure which way works best for each farmer continues to be hurdle for farmers. Farmers markets are interested in having the meat products and supporting local farms. The farmer needs to figure out whether it is a realistic and economical opportunity for his farm.

Advisory committee of four farmers was established. They were interested in continuing pursuing the work started with the grant.

Current or future benefits to be derived from the project: One direct benefit from the project was opportunity to create a team of individuals interested in grass-fed beef and lamb in Ohio. We were able to use the people and resources from this project to connect with “La Roque” Institute in Rodze-Aveyron , France. This helped us to learn more about French butchering techniques and direct marketing options. The result has been talking with farmers and processors about doing more specialty and added value cuts. They are encouraged to do specialty “cuts from the carcass” rather than making into ground beef. Farmers, processors, educators, industry representatives, chefs, and consumers have gotten interested in learning more about grass-fed beef and market opportunities. In addition, the project connected us with the US Jersey Association who has been working to create beef value from their beef steers. Small Farm Institute, OSU Extension and Researchers, Ohio Forage and Grasslands Council co-hosted an event in June 2009 for 350 Jersey farmers that served the Jersey grass fed beef. The event showed Jersey dairy farmers that there are other income sources from their farms. We see as opening up more resources for the dairy farmers, the OSU beef extension and researchers as well as other dairy and beef farmers working with Small Farm Institute and others through the state. Several grants have been and continue to be submitted to work with the processors to help them with creating the added value cuts and working with their farmers on other parts of the infrastructure. North Union Farmers Market, Parker Bosley and Leah Miller have discussed about using a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model in combination with current farmers markets for grass-fed beef products.

Ohio Forage and Grasslands Council have requested a grass-fed beef field day. The growing interest in local food systems has created a request for information about the project. Small Farm Institute has had questions about how to find farmers interested in selling grass-fed beef as well as farmers looking for market connections. Farmers are looking for workshops and conferences on how to raise better meat on grass and what to ask the processor.

We recognize that time needs to be spent in establishing market connections for the farmers and to expand their involvement in direct marketing. Some farmers are better at direct marketing and farmers’ market activities than others. This can become a partnership opportunities for these different farmers to pool their strengths and work together.

Four farmers agreed to serve on an advisory committee to help identify future workshops and areas for the project to expand and continue work.

Additional information available: Notebook created for the participants. Most of the materials will be added to www.smallfarminstitute.org website. As additional materials are developed, they will be added to website.

Contact person for the project: Leah Miller, Small Farm Institute Director, leah@smallfarminstitute.org 740.545.6349.

Description of the people, organizations, marketing entities and/or communities that have benefited from the project’s accomplishments: The project started out focusing on 20 grass-fed dairy and beef farmers close to the Cleveland area since we were partnering with North Union Farmers Markets. We invited them to participate since they were close to Cleveland area. As the project started, grass-fed beef farmers from other parts of the state heard about the activities and joined different workshops depending on their time and interests. Parker Bosley had identified the interest and need for grass-fed beef at the various North Union Farmers Markets from consumers. He was able to get two farmers to participate in the market and to help with some of the workshop activities. Ohio State University Extension county agricultural educator was asked to present at one of the workshops and he attended other workshops. The same occurred with the Natural Resources Conservation Service state grasslands conservationist. The

Ohio State University Animal Science Department had three professors working with the project (Dr. Paul Kuber, Dr. Henry Zerby, and Dr. Francis Fluharty). They invited other professors, graduate and undergraduate students to participate at different workshops. Small Farm Institute Director and project director, Leah Miller, has gotten requests for materials and information about the workshops and when other workshops would be planned in the future. The US Jersey Association got involved with co-sponsoring an event that hosted their international Jersey farmer tour in June 2009. They were introduced to the project and potential for grass-fed beef direct market through farmers markets. Ohio Forage and Grasslands Council has a number of grass-fed beef farmers and this project will be in their Fall 2009 newsletter. The North Central Ohio Dairy Grazing Conference in 2008 had 50 dairy farmers attend a break-out session about the potential for grass-fed beef as an added value opportunity through farmers markets. Parker Bosley shared at that event the interest of consumers at farmers markets to purchase grass-fed beef. Other groups that have benefited: two local Wooster Ohio chefs, Ohio State University Sheep Team, Ohio State University Beef Team, Millersburg Rotary Club, Local Foods System Project at OARDC, Ohio Agriculture Research and Development Center Advisory Committee, Ohio Signature Beef Project.

**Small Farm Institute
28850 SR 621
Fresno, OH 43824
740.545.6349**

June 15, 2009

You participated in one or more of the Grass Based Beef Project activities sponsored through Small Farm Institute. Small Farm Institute received a grant from USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program in September 2007. The grant was called "*Building a Grass-Fed Production Infrastructure to Support Marketing and Serve Consumers' Demands*".

I am asked for your help in evaluating what you gained from the activities and to share any experience that you have had with direct marketing beef. The information will be used to help others interested in direct marketing and producing grass based beef as well as an evaluation piece for grantor of the USDA FMPP funds. The grant is to be wrapped up by June 30, 2009 so the survey needs to be returned by **June 24, 2009**. You may email your responses or filled out the form and mail it back.

General information:

Currently we are raised beef. YES or NO

Is the beef grass fed? YES or NO

Do you sell your beef to others? YES or NO

Do you sell your beef through farmers market? YES or NO

Do you sell direct market your beef from the farm? YES or NO

Do you sell other livestock meat through farmers market? YES or NO

Do you sell other livestock meat from the farm? YES or NO

ssions that you attended: Please circle

March 27, 2008 at OARDC in Thorne Hall. Discussion on your farm, interest in direct marketing, goals and questions. YES (attended) or NO (did not attend)

April 29, 2008 at ATI cafeteria (Henry Zerby-meat cutting lesson and Parker Bosley-cooking demonstration)

YES (attended) or NO (did not attend)

May 23, 2008 at Mike Gessel's farm (Bob Hendershot, Francis Fluharty and Jeff McCutcheon grazing management strategies and nutrition discussion)

YES (attended) or NO (did not attend)

June 28, 2008 at Crocker Park Cleveland (North Union Farmers Market with Parker Bosley and Francis Fluharty on consumer interested and demand for grass fed beef)

YES (attended) or No (did not attend)

July 2, 2008 at OARDC in Gerlaugh Hall (Paul Kuber sharing sensory impact, consumer interest, branding, demand)

YES (attended) or NO (did not attend)

Other questions:

What was helpful for you in the sessions that you attended?

Do you see yourself looking to do direct marketing in a farmers market? YES or NO
Why?

What are infrastructure issues that you have faced with producing and selling grass based beef or livestock?

Any type of field days, workshops, tours or programs that you would like to see offered?

Other comments and observations:

Would you be willing to serve on an informal advisory group to develop activities for grass based livestock? If so, may I have your name?

Thank you.

Leah Miller Small Farm Institute Director

**Survey Summary from Grassfed Beef Project (FMPP)
Small Farm Institute 2007-2009**

“Building a Grass-Fed Production Infrastructure to Support Marketing and Serve Consumers’ Demands”

Comments from the survey:

What was helpful for you in the sessions that you attended:

1. The reminder that grain fed beef looks, feels different (pasty and mush to me). Also taste is bland-not as interesting. BUT if this is someone else’s benchmark for good beef, grass fed would not rate well, possibly
2. We liked the meat cutting by Zerby and cooking by Bosley. We learned a lot from that session

Do you see yourself looking to do direct marketing in a farmer market:

1. Already am. Doing direct marketing because farmer can set the price. With steady market, not depend on livestock auction prices. Given that, farmers’ market is a good opportunity to make contact with eaters of our meat—so get feedback and can adjust management to meet consumer needs. Way to support community and help tie nonfarmers back to the land a little. Also a way to build consumer base.
2. Maybe: We may move our farm from dairy to beef in future
3. No sure. It will depend if we can sell everything by ½ or ¼.
4. No. We have developed our own customer base, with includes friends and co-workers.

What are infrastructure issues that you have faced with producing and selling grass based beef or livestock?

1. Our biggest challenge was how to price the different cuts of beef. Our local processor helped us in developing a price structure.
2. Marketing
3. We started from scratch four years ago so we had plenty. We did not have anything like land, cows or any machines or implements.
4. Most issues just because direct marketing, not because grass feed... Butcher availability—consistency/quality of work. Cost of ink/printer for flyers, cards, etc. Cost of inspected scale. Cost of freezers/meat storage. For additional farmers’ markets, the cost of paying someone to go. Transportation costs. To sell to Whole Foods, must have special inspection (animal welfare) of butcher at cost of \$1000 or higher that will probably need to be done twice. Also may need refrigerator truck to transport meat to them. With cooperation of several farmers and butchers, could work.

Any type of field days, workshops, tours or programs that you would like to see offered?

1. Someone to coordinate larger scale direct marketing, such as to Whole Foods—a facilitator to coordinate freezer truck, butcher scheduling, etc for use by multiple farmers—perhaps a common label. Offering the above workshops again for another audience.

Other comments and observations: Would like to have samples from several local grass fed beef producers as well as one local grain fed sample. Perhaps samples could come from participants and difference in taste, texture, etc could be tied to different breeds, pasture type, age of slaughter, etc.—management variables.