

ENABLING FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WAL-MART BUYING PROGRAM FY 2012

In July 2008, Walmart announced its commitment to source more local fruits and vegetables to keep produce prices down and provide affordable selections that are fresh and healthful. In response, the Alcorn State University - Mississippi Small Farm and Agribusiness Center established a relationship with Wal-Mart and its produce buyer, C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc. with the goal of assisting local producers to improve the quality and quantity of their crops to supply this new market. The current FSMIP project built on the success of a previous FSMIP project "Quality Control in the Flow of Mississippi Produced Vegetables to Markets" with the goal to supply selected produce, primarily watermelons, peas and greens, to the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. This project also was designed to educate participants and other local farmers on a step-by-step process essential for delivery of safe, high quality produce to the market. The project would also strengthen their capacity to respond positively and substantially to the demand for local, healthy, sustainably produced food, and participate in the *Make Mine Mississippi* Program.

The goals and expected outcomes of the project were achieved and exceeded the project team's overall expectations. The initial goal was to train 150 farmers through specialized workshops and informational group meetings on best practices needed to effectively market products for the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. Thirty-one small-scale farmers participated and directly benefitted from the project through increased sales, and in the course of the project, Alcorn provided 11 educational trainings to 229 farmers. All project participants benefited from the project with changes in knowledge and awareness of the program and learning first-hand, the criteria for preparing produce for the commercial market.

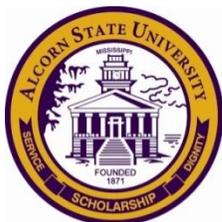
FINAL REPORT

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MISSISSIPPI SMALL FARM AND AGRIBUSINESS CENTER

*Enabling Farmers to Participate in the Walmart
Buy Local Program*

FEDERAL-STATE MARKETING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

**Dr. Magid Dagher, Principal Investigator
Elizabeth Benjamin-Myles Co-Principal Investigator**

September 2012 – August 2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The activities of this project were developed and implemented by Alcorn State University - Mississippi Small Farm and Agribusiness Center (ASU-MSFAC) and supported under the United States Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS) for the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of USDA-AMS. ASU-MSFAC extends sincere gratitude to USDA-AMS, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, project participants and all persons who assisted in accomplishing the goal and objectives of the project.

TITLE OF PROJECT AND GRANT PERIOD

The title of the project is “Enabling Local Farmers to Participate in the Walmart *Buy Local* Program.” The grant period was September 2012 – August 2014 with a subsequent project extension through December 2014.

BACKGROUND ISSUES OR PROBLEM

Agriculture is Mississippi’s number one industry, employing approximately 29% of the state’s workforce either directly or indirectly. Agriculture in Mississippi is a 7.02 billion-dollar industry. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, there are approximately 42,400 farms in the state covering 11.2 million acres. The average size farm is approximately 263 acres. Agriculture makes a significant contribution to all 82 counties. Small farmers and cooperatives have faced many challenges over the last few decades. Several major trends have posed problems for them: substitution of capital for labor, economies of scale in production and marketing, fewer but larger farms, cost-price squeeze, prevalence of pure competition in production agriculture, greater competition from foreign producers, and shrinking share of the marketing bill. Small farmers and limited-resource cooperatives have to overcome more challenges and barriers than their larger counterparts. Among the many challenges is the ability to supply available markets with high quality fresh products. Enhancement of market opportunities and access to needed resources in a timely manner remain key challenges but are currently being addressed in a proactive, systematic manner by the government (U.S. Congress, 2008) and the private sector (Walmart, 2010).

Market research conducted by ASU-MSFAC and other entities conclude that buyers, especially the large vegetable procurers and distributors, demand a high quality product since their customers will pay a premium price for quality. The price of produce is reflective of the quality, with the high quality product receiving a higher price and the low quality, a lower price. In the case of mishandled and damaged produce, the product is typically rejected, resulting in financial loss and hardship for the producer. Even if secondary markets are found, the poor quality products are usually sold at a loss. The bottom line is, there is a high market demand for a high quality product.

ASU-MSFAC, in collaboration with Alcorn State University Extension Program, has assisted small-scale producers in diversifying farming operations; however, the collaboration seeks to continue efforts in increasing value-added production of southern peas processed and labeled under the guidelines of the *Make Mine Mississippi* Marketing Campaign. With this endorsement, a sufficient volume of southern peas was processed at the Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility (ASU-VPF) and shipped to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in New Albany, Mississippi.

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The Center has established a relationship with Wal-Mart and its produce buyer, C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc. In July 2008, Walmart (Heritage Agriculture Program) announced its commitment to source more local fruits and vegetables to keep produce prices down and provide affordable selections that are fresh and healthful. The retailer also reported that partnerships with local farmers have grown by 50 percent over the past two years. This is one example of the company's effort to support local economies, cut its shipping costs, and provide fresh food production opportunities to hundreds of growers across the United States. These local producers supply produce for re-sale in Wal-Mart Supercenters and Neighborhood Markets, contributing to making Wal-Mart the nation's largest purchaser of locally grown produce.

Figure 1: During summer months, locally sourced fruits and vegetables that are both grown and available for sale within a state's borders make up a fifth of the produce available in Wal-Mart stores. During the months of August and September 2011, throughput at ASU-VPF increased as North Delta Produce Growers Association's producer-members and other small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers delivered 800 lbs. of purple hull peas of great quality, packed in clamshells, with no rejections by the Walmart Distribution Center in New Albany, Mississippi. The *locally grown in Mississippi* and *Make Mine Mississippi* labeled clamshells were placed in over forty stores throughout Mississippi. Also, 1,200 lbs. of purple hull peas were donated to the Food Bank in Memphis, Tennessee. The foregoing attests to Alcorn's knowledge of the step-by-step process that enables small-scale farmers and cooperatives to participate in the Wal-Mart *Buy Local* Program.



Figure 1: 2011 Southern Peas packed at Alcorn's Marks Vegetable Processing Facility using the *Locally Grown in Mississippi* and *Make Mine Mississippi* black and white labels

This proposed and funded project will build on the project “*Quality Control in the Flow of Mississippi Produced Vegetables to Markets.*” The small farmers and limited-resource cooperatives were trained in quality control from production to harvesting, postharvest handling and marketing. Therefore, they will be able to successfully supply high quality products to available markets and expand opportunities for producers to also market products to other wholesale and retail markets.

The purpose of this project was to enable Mississippi small-scale farmers and cooperatives to supply selected produce (primarily watermelons, peas and greens) to the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. This project was designed to educate participants on a step-by-step process that is essential for delivery of safe, high quality produce to the market. The project would also strengthen their capacity to respond positively and substantially to the demand for local, healthy, sustainably produced food and participate in the *Make Mine Mississippi* Program. Despite increased production and consumer interest, locally grown food accounts for a small segment of U.S. agriculture. However, the trend is certainly oriented toward increasing growth. For local food production to continue to flourish, marketing channels and supply chain infrastructure must deepen. Small-scale farmers' products would flow from the farm to market primarily through ASU-VPF, located in Marks, Mississippi. Alcorn has facilitated linking farmers to several major wholesale and retail markets, specifically C. H. Robinson and Walmart. The project provided educational training and demonstration to small-scale farmers and cooperatives that were interested in participating in the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. There was discussion that Walmart was willing to purchase from local producers; however, there existed a step-by-step process that producers would have to engage in prior to successfully supplying the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. The step-by-step process included food safety and information from production to consumption. The model developed and applied here would expand opportunities for producers to also market products to other wholesale and retail markets.

PROJECT APPROACH

Logical and appropriate approaches were employed to achieve the objectives and goal of the project. The first step entailed identifying, screening and selecting farmers and cooperatives that were seeking markets to sustain their operations. The farmers were identified through cooperation with Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, North Delta Produce Growers Association, and other farmers that engaged in commercial vegetable production and marketing through the ASU-VPF. Other farmers were identified at trainings, workshops, conferences, and field days hosted by Alcorn and other local and state agencies. Baseline data were collected from all farmer participants at the beginning of the project based on the commercial vegetable production criteria. The baseline data consisted of acreage, previous enterprise, production records, capital, labor, and delivery methods. After analyzing the baseline data, thirty-one (31) participants were selected and their information and data were entered into the ASU-MSFAC database. The database has individual profiles to track the success of the participants' operations

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on a yearly basis. Although thirty-one met the criteria for commercial vegetable production, many other farmers attended the trainings for awareness.

SEPTEMBER 2012 – AUGUST 2014			
Dates	Trainings and Activities	Locations	Numbers of participants/ farmers
December 1–2, 2012	Walmart 2 nd Successful Marketing Opportunities for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Conference Presented on the Walmart Buy Local Program	Tuskegee, AL	Staff presented at Conference
May 21, 2013	GAP/GHP Workshop	Alcorn State, MS	24
June 18, 2013	Walmart Meeting	Marks, MS	17
October 10, 2013	Marketing Strategies to Sell Produce to Walmart	Marks, MS	12
November 13, 2013	Walmart Buy Local Program Requirements, Best Varieties and Quality Assurance	Moorhead, MS	10
December 13, 2013	Successes for 2013 Walmart Buy Local Program Farmers Award Luncheon	Batesville, MS	51
December 14, 2013	Planning and Marketing Training	Moorhead, MS	10
February 21, 2014	Provide step-by-step technical assistance and best practices to enable Mississippi small-scale farmers and cooperatives to supply selected produce to the Walmart Buy Local Program	Marks, MS	17
March 19, 2014	Production, Finance, Food Safety, Marketing and Processing Training	Marks, MS	26
May 1, 2014	USDA Produce GAP's Harmonized Certification Training	Jackson, MS	4
November 10, 2014	Selling Your Produce in the Market	Moorhead, MS	45
November 11, 2014	Tour Kroger Delta Regional Warehouse	Memphis, TN	13
Total Farmers/Participants			229

Training schedules were developed with training dates, activities/topics and locations. During the training sessions, the participants were provided information on step-by-step technical assistance to supply Walmart *Buy Local* Program that involved: production practices, disease control, farm plan; recordkeeping, enterprise budgets, cold chain requirements, transportation/delivery, financial management, and insurance/product liability; internal management and controls; and sharing of

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knowledge, resources needed, handling large volumes/quantities of produce, best varieties, and quality assurance programs. Training modules were designed for participants on Good Agriculture Practice (GAP), Good Handling Practice (GHP), food safety, product liability, and farm labor regulations. These modules were developed and a training session on USDA Produce GAP's Harmonized Certification Training was facilitated by the Food Safety and Agribusiness Specialist at Alcorn State University, Nicole Bell. Several trainings and workshops were held to discuss commercial production and marketing with various farmers' cooperatives and local agencies. During these trainings and workshops, the Walmart *Buy Local* Program was mentioned in detail. However, eleven (11) trainings were held specifically on the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. Training sessions were held at Alcorn State University, Marks, Moorhead, Batesville and Jackson. Exhibits, PowerPoint presentations, brochures, packaging and labeling displays were used at each training session.

RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to enable Mississippi small-scale farmers and cooperatives to supply selected produce specifically (watermelons, peas and greens) to the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. The objectives were to: (1) identify, screen and select small-scale farmers and cooperatives that have been growing produce the past few years and are in search of markets so they can sustain their operations; (2) provide step-by-step technical assistance and best practices to enable Mississippi small-scale farmers and cooperatives to supply selected produce to the Walmart *Buy Local* Program; (3) provide technical assistance and training to small-scale farmers and cooperatives on Good Agriculture Practice (GAP), Good Handling Practice (GHP), food safety, product liability, and farm labor regulations; and (4) evaluate success of the pilot project and its potential application on a broader scale.

The goals and expected outcomes of the project were achieved and exceeded the project team's overall expectations. The project goal was to train 150 farmers through specialized workshops and informational group meetings on best practices needed for effective marketing of products for the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. The project provided eleven (11) educational trainings to 229 farmers directly and they benefited from the project with changes in knowledge and awareness of the program and the criteria. ASU-VPF received USDA certification in 2013 and 2014 during the project and continues to be successful in this area.

The participants enthusiasm elevated when their product filled the shelves of over forty Walmart stores throughout the state. The newly designed labels "*Locally Grown in Mississippi*" and "*Make Mine Mississippi*" highlighted the 16 oz. clamshells. In 2012, the participants were collectively paid \$37,125 for shelled peas; however, in 2013, this amount decreased to \$15,589.50 due to inclement weather. In 2014, the amount increased to \$26,664 with a combined total over the three years of \$79,378.50. Expanding their farming operations to commercial production level proved profitable over the three years. The chart (Appendix 1 on page 13) demonstrates the increase in production and revenue received by the farmers as a result of sales to Walmart. The local farmers' products were placed in over forty stores throughout Mississippi and shipped from the Walmart distribution center in New Albany, MS. The project participants toured the Kroger Distribution Center in Memphis, TN to enhance their knowledge and

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experience. The participants appreciated an opportunity to tour the facilities and view value-added production.

Evaluation instruments were developed for the participants in the Walmart *Buy Local* Program to complete before and after the trainings in order to gauge their knowledge of commercial production and marketing. Project staff collected the data from eight (8) training sessions and placed them in an excel spreadsheet to show the feedback obtained from the participants. The data were analyzed and showed that, prior to the trainings, the participants' knowledge was fair; and after the trainings, their knowledge increased to excellent. The project achieved the objectives during the two-year period, and there were increases in production and sales.

CONCLUSION

ASU-MSFAC enabled Mississippi small-scale farmers and cooperatives to participate in the Walmart *Buy Local* Program. Activities included trainings, workshops and tours to local distribution centers that purchase fresh produce from local farmers. The program enabled the small-scale farmers and cooperatives to participate in and exploit commercial market opportunities. Their produce flowed through ASU-VPF, located in Marks, Mississippi (Quitman County). ASU-MSFAC built a strong relationship with C. H. Robinson and Walmart.

The Walmart *Buy Local* Program increased sales and farm income and enhanced knowledge of commercial vegetable production and marketing. The project strengthened the participants' capacity to respond positively and substantially to the demand for local, healthy, sustainably-produced food and participate in the *Make Mine Mississippi* Program. The models developed and applied during this project have provided opportunities for entry to other wholesale and retail markets. MPalazola Produce and Kroger in Memphis, Tennessee purchased products from the participants in the project and increased their farm income. Winn-Dixie in Hammond, Louisiana showed interest in local, small-scale farmers and cooperatives aggregating their products in order to deliver the quantities of mixed produce desired. Through Walmart *Buy Local* Program, thirty-one (31) small-scale farmers participated and directly benefitted from the project and 229 Mississippi farmers successfully completed the training.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned were local farmers can illustrate to other farmers and potentially new farmers that products can be sold to commercial markets and money can be made from the project. Local farmers created economic development during the program by hiring at least two laborers to assist them with harvesting their crops. Several farmers were interested in the program but had constraints such as: irrigation, food safety certification, capital and labor.

Individual local Walmart stores are interested in purchasing produce directly from farmers, but the product liability insurance and delivery costs are rather high and, therefore, not cost effective. The Brookhaven, Mississippi Walmart only purchases local produce when its inventory is low on certain items. All other products are shipped from the Hammond, Louisiana warehouse.

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The sudden change in packaging from the clamshells to bags slowed the Walmart *Buy Local* Program in 2014; therefore, the lesson learned is to communicate early in the season to assure the packaging and other things have not changed. Also, inclement weather can cause a delay meeting the demand for products.

CURRENT OR FUTURE BENEFITS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The project model can be duplicated in central and southern Mississippi regions. Similar projects can be developed, funded and implemented. Future participants have been identified, and future benefits/recommendations are:

1. Expand production, aggregate products and deliver desired volumes to existing and new markets
2. The thirty-one (31) active participants can serve as mentors to new farmers and also become involved in the *train-the-trainer* initiative.

BENEFICIARIES

Thirty-one small-scale farmers participated and directly benefitted from the project; however, grant funds were also used to provide marketing training to 229 producers. Also, Mississippi consumers are considered beneficiaries of this project because locally grown, Mississippi produced vegetables were sold in local Wal-Mart supercenters and stores. Moreover, the number of beneficiaries increased because the grant and matching funds afforded ASU-MSFAC an opportunity to provide part-time employment for graduate and undergraduate students. Also, the project hired three consultants to assist with successfully completing the project, "Enabling Farmers to Participate in the Walmart *Buy Local* Program."

Consultants:

In October 2014, **Widget Development & Trading Company (Widget DTC)** contacted buyers for Mississippi Delta farmers. Widget DTC made contact with the following buyers:

1. Publix Stores
2. Winn Dixie
3. C & S Wholesale Grocers
4. Kroger Stores

The responses from the buyers were:

1. **Publix Stores** purchase produce from farmers in the states they operate in. Presently Publix do not operate any stores in the State of Mississippi, therefore, they are not interested at this time.
2. **Winn Dixie Stores** are interested in purchasing produce from farmers and Bill Peltier, Local Produce Buyer made a site visit to the Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Plant to tour the facility and met with several of the

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farmers. Widget DTC was approved as a vendor to market produce grown by the Mississippi Delta Farmers.

3. **C & S Wholesale Grocers** is a wholesale distributor that provides warehousing services for Winn Dixie and other retailers. C & S maintains warehousing operations throughout the nation. Widget DTC was approved by C & S Wholesale Grocers as a vendor. Approval as a vendor with C & S Wholesale Grocers gives Widget DTC the opportunity to provide produce to other retailers throughout the country.
4. **Kroger Stores** are interested in working with Widget DTC to provide produce from the Mississippi Delta Farmers to the Kroger Delta Regional Warehouse in Memphis, TN. Kroger scheduled a tour of their facility and a meeting with farmers on November 11, 2014 to gather additional information about the produce the farmers are growing.

“Foodlink” a national system set-up for the coordination of the issuing of Purchase Orders, and Processing of Invoices for produce sold in the United States. Winn Dixie, C & S Wholesale Grocers, and Kroger Stores utilize this system to issue its purchase orders (PO’s). Widget DTC has this capability to assist the farmers.

In November 2014, Widget DTC conducted training in Moorhead, MS with 45 participants to prepare for the upcoming production season. The training included a discussion on:

- Follow-up on Freeze/Crop Damage of fall vegetables
- Identify growers for Spring 2015
- Crops planted
- Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Certification
- Liability Insurance
- Delivery and Distribution of products

Widget DTC toured the Kroger Delta Regional Warehouse in Memphis, TN with 13 participants. A press release was developed by Alcorn State University Office of AREAS Communications highlighting the activities.

Delta Global Farms, LLC.

During the months of August 2013 – January 2014 Delta Global Farms, LLC. conducted several marketing and distribution trainings on the Walmart Buy Local Program in Marks, MS. Delta Global Farms, LLC. met with nine (9) individual farmers in Itta Bena, Cruger, Greenwood and Moorhead, MS concerning participating in the Walmart Buy Local Program and producing greens. Several of the farmers needed product liability insurance, food safety certification and irrigation prior to participating in the program.

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The farmers did not have enough quantity to meet the demand, therefore they were not participants in the program. However, they are preparing to participate in the 2015 program.

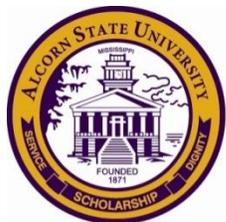
Michael McNair

During the months of June 2013- November 2013 Michael McNair met with twelve (12) farmers on the Walmart Buy Local Program in Petal, Prentiss, and Oskeya, MS on watermelon production. Several of the farmers considered for the program were in need of food safety certification. He indicated that the Walmart Buy Local Program has great potential of increasing the economic benefit of local limited resource producers and our economy. He stated that the headquarters for Walmart needs better communication with its regional stores. It appears that some of the local stores don't have the capacity of making buying decisions for the direct store deliveries. The Brookhaven, MS Walmart store only purchase products from local farmers when they are low on certain items. All other products are shipped from the Hammond, LA warehouse. Another obstacle is the product liability insurance required to sell to Walmart or other potential buyers who may also require product liability insurance. His recommendations were:

- * Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Certification
- *Applying for loans if needed
- *Compiling anticipated production acres for harvest projections. (Production acres and variety)
- *Production & Marketing workshops
- *Address Labor Issues
- *Training on Farm to School Program
- *Select a pool of 7-10 producers to meet objectives
- *Scheduled Buyer Tours/Meet the Buyers any time before Spring Planting
- *Secure Prices for Products
- *Forming a Cooperative to Pool Resources

PUBLICATION

Harvove, T.; Hill, W.; Brown, J.; Robinson, M.; Cole-Crosby, I.; Myles, E.; Lawton, B.; & Martin, K. (2014). A case study analysis of a regional food system: the sustainable agriculture consortium for historically disadvantaged farmers program. Retrieved from <http://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/pawj/vol1/iss2/4>



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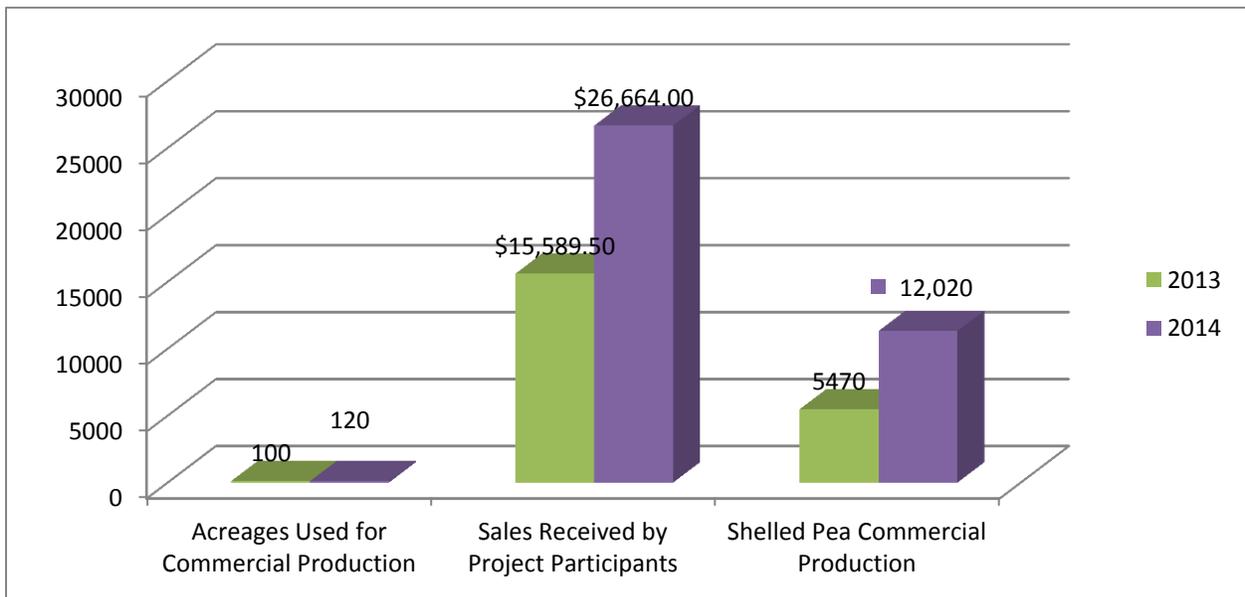
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Chart



Sales for Walmart Buy Local Participants

2013-2014 Increase

YEARS	2013	2014
NUMBER OF ACRES	100	120
Sales	\$15,589.50	\$26,664.00
CLAMSHELLS	5,470	12,020

APPENDIX 2

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Figure 2. (Left Photo) Charles Houston, Kerrex Taylor, Tony Mason, Hope Crenshaw and Dietrich Johnson completes train-the-trainer GAP/GHP training

Figure 3 (Right Photo) Kerrex Taylor, Keith Benson and Tony Mason discuss future collaborations

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Figure 4. Elizabeth B. Myles present to participants on the Walmart Buy Local Program



Figure 5. Percy Baldwin presents to participants on the Walmart Buy Local Program processing purple hull peas criteria

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Figure 6. North Delta Produce Growers Association and local producers attend Walmart Buy Local Training



Figure 7. North Delta Produce Growers Association and local producers attend Walmart Buy Local Training



Figure 8. Elizabeth B. Myles, James Brewer (local farmer) and Percy Baldwin—FARM VISIT



Figure 9. Purple Hull Peas blooming

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Figure 10. Alcorn State University Processing Facility in Marks, MS

Figure 11. USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Visits Marks, MS Processing Facility

Assistant Secretary for Administration, Dr. Gregory Parham, visit to the facility, addressed a group that



included: Karis Gutter, Deputy Undersecretary of Farm and Foreign Agriculture Service, Carlissia Graham, Special Assistant, Malcolm Shorter, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, Carolyn Parker, Director, Office of Advocacy and Outreach and representatives from Mississippi Natural Resource Conservation Service, Rural Development and Farm Service Agency, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives and Alcorn State University by outlining the tremendous success that has occurred in Mississippi as result of the Walmart *Buy Local* Initiative.

Walmart Reps Visit Local Vegetable Processing Plant

Walmart representatives Mike Meyers and Michael Sostrin, recently met with the North Delta Produce Growers Association and representatives of Alcorn State University to discuss the 2013 Purple Hull Peas project. The 2012 Walmart buy-local initiative is where Walmart purchased locally grown purple hull peas from small Mississippi farmers and sold them in the fresh produce departments of their local stores. It was a great year for Mississippi Delta farmers, Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility, North Delta Producer Growers Association's producer-members and other small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers. The North Delta Produce Growers Association has delivered over 13,250 (18 oz. clamshells) of purple hull peas with great quality and no rejections to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in New Albany, MS.

C.H. Robinson Worldwide, a third-party procurement provider, as-

sisted with transportation logistics. The clamshells were placed in over fifty (50) stores throughout Mississippi. The Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility partnered with the local Department of Human Services to employ six individuals to assist with the Walmart Purple Hull pea project to start enhancing economic development in the delta region.

The local farmers were pleased with the price per shelled bushel that they received on last year and they are looking forward to increasing acreage for the 2013 program. "This is truly a major milestone for all partners involved especially meeting the needs of our Mississippi delta farmers and their families. Also, partnering with the Mississippi Department of Agriculture "Make Mine Mississippi" program to promote locally grown produce in the state, said Elizabeth Myles, Marketing Specialist, Alcorn State University Mississippi Small Farm and Agribusiness Specialist.



Above, Percy Baldwin, Walmart Representative, Mike Meyers, John Carpenter, Walmart Representative Michael Sostrin, Carl Nicosia, Elizabeth Myles, D. Johnson, Joyce Nicosia, Ora Carpenter, James Brewer, Larry Russell, Roosevelt Holmes, and Kerrex Taylor

Figure 12. Walmart visit on the Walmart Buy Local Program is featured in the local paper at Alcorn State University Processing Facility in Marks, MS



Figure 13. Walmart article featured in the local paper with Quitman County Board of Supervisor Member, Brook Earnest at Alcorn State University Processing Facility in Marks, MS

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1st Edition | March 2013

NORTH DELTA PRODUCE GROWERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



WALMART BUY LOCAL INITIATIVE

The 2012 Walmart buy-local initiative is where Walmart purchases locally grown purple hull peas from small Mississippi farmers and sells them in the fresh produce departments of their local stores. It has been a great one for Mississippi Delta farmers, Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility, North Delta Producer Growers Association's producer-members and other small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers. North Delta Produce Growers Association have delivered over 13,000 (18 oz. clamshells) of purple hull peas with great quality and no rejections to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in New Albany, MS. C.H. Robinson Worldwide (a third-party provider) assisted with the transportation logistics. The clamshells were placed in over fifty (50) stores throughout Mississippi.

The Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility partnered with the local Department of Human Services to employ six individuals to assist with the Walmart Purple Hull pea project to start enhancing economic development in the delta region. The local farmers were pleased with the

initiative in two important ways. First, by sourcing products from regions closer to their point of sale, we're able to reduce the miles that products have to travel, and in turn, cut transportation costs out of the supply chain. We can then pass those savings along to customers. This is one way we have been able to save customers more than \$1 billion on fresh fruits and vegetables. Today, Walmart gets watermelons from 27 states; cantaloupes from 19 states; pumpkins from 26 states; strawberries from 11 States; blueberries from 15 states; apples from 23 states; citrus from 6 states; pears from 6 states; stonefruit from 17 states; potatoes from 25 states. All in all, we're sourcing locally from 41 states across the U.S.—Ron McCormick, Senior Director, Sustainable Agriculture Produce, Floral and Local Sourcing Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Hats off to our Mississippi Delta farmers that participated in the 2012 Walmart buy-

"WALMART" continued on page 2

Dr. McAfee with Walmart Truck at loading dock.

price per shelled bushel that they received on last year and they are looking forward to increasing acreage for the 2013 program. Local sourcing supports this nutrition

North Delta Produce Growers Association • P.O. Box 392 • Marks, Mississippi 38646
Phone: 662-444-7816 or 662-207-5960 • Email: carpenterjohn@bellsouth.net
Designed by www.MarqueusDraper.com

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Figure 14. Walmart Buy Local Program is featured in North Delta Produce Growers Association newsletter March 2013 edition

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“WALMART” continued from page 1

local initiative and the Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility staff under the leadership of Percy Baldwin, Facility Manager, a job well done! Working together, we see the possibility of doing so much more.

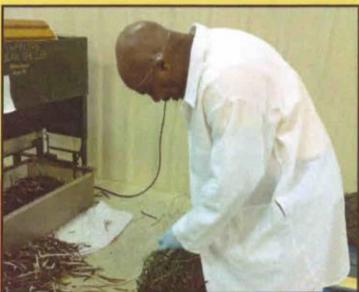
For more information on the Wal-Mart “Buy Local” Program, please contact Mrs. Elizabeth B. Myles at 601.877.3947 or emyles@alcorn.edu.



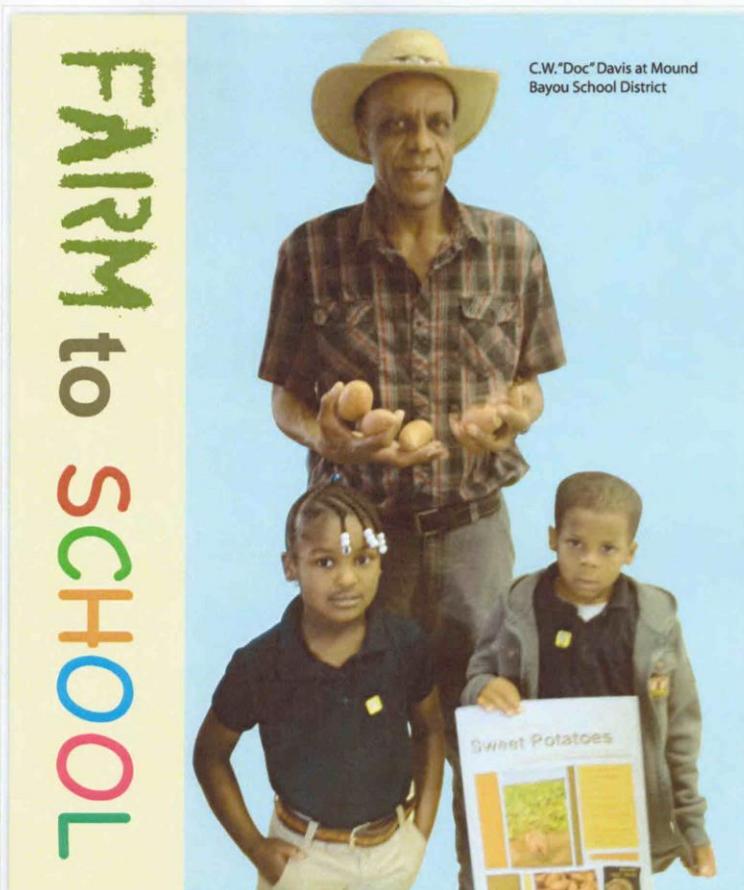
(L) Mr. Holmes & (R) Percy Baldwin, Facility Manager



Peas, Clamshells and Make Mine Mississippi Logo



Percy Baldwin in ASU Vegetable Processing facility



C.W. “Doc” Davis at Mound Bayou School District

It’s lunchtime in the Mississippi Delta and in Clarksdale-area cafeterias students are happily tearing into fresh, baked sweet potatoes. No need for any fancy prep – tin foil and oven heat did the trick.

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Davis’ delivery coincides with Mississippi’s inaugural Farm to School Week, which falls the first week of October. One reason for the push to promote healthier meals: the state’s children rank first in obesity in the country.

And farmers can be excited about the effort because of the market it helps open. Over 17 million meals are served in Mississippi Delta schools annually. Betz estimates that the Delta produce market for schools is between \$15 million and \$20 million annually.

Figure 15. Walmart Buy Local Program is featured in North Delta Produce Growers Association newsletter March 2013 edition –Page 2

United States Department of Agriculture



This is to verify that **Alcorn State University Processing Facility; Marks, MS**

has successfully passed the initial elements of the voluntary

USDA Audit Program using the

Produce GAPs Harmonized Food Safety Standard

To verify continued adherence to the program, please visit <http://www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp>

Produce GAPs Harmonized Post-Harvest Audit with the Global Markets Program for Primary Production

Various Fruits and Vegetables

5/7/2013

Date
EV-247(07-98)

Looney A. Tibbitt

Chief, Processed Products Branch

Figure 16. 2013 Alcorn State University Processing Facility in Marks, MS receives USDA Produce GAPs Harmonized Food Safety Certification



United States Department of Agriculture

This is to verify that

Alcorn State University Processing Facility

Marks, Mississippi

has successfully met USDA's acceptance criteria of the voluntary

Produce GAPs Harmonized Food Safety Standard

Assorted Fruits & Vegetables - Post-Harvest Operations, Global Markets Program for Primary Production

Lauren A. Tidwell
Director, Specialty Crops Inspection Division

May 2014

Audits are valid for one year from date on certificate. To verify continued adherence to the program, please visit <http://www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp>

Figure 17. 2014 Alcorn State University Processing Facility in Marks, MS receives USDA Produce GAPs Harmonized Food Safety Certification

ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT

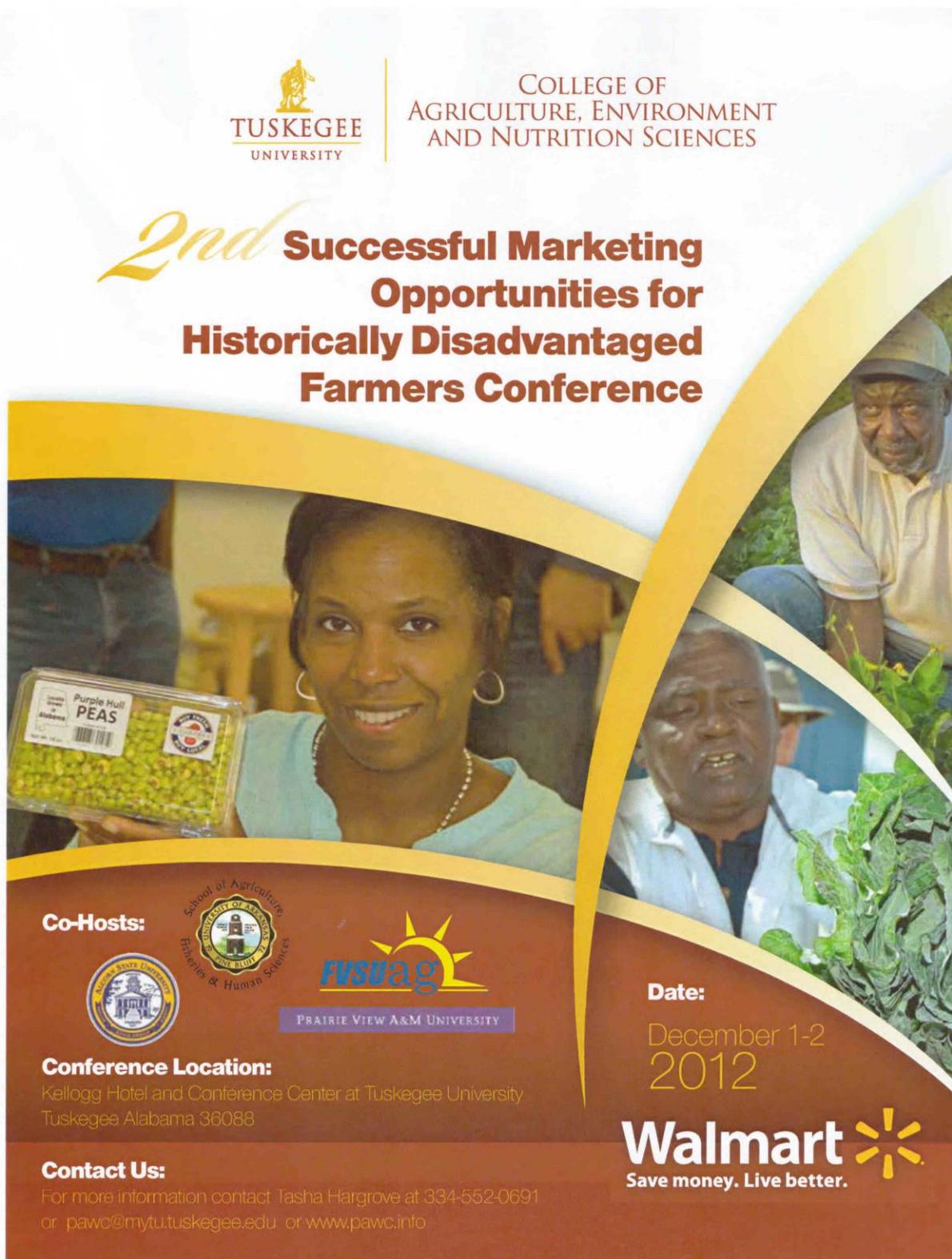


Figure 18. Purple Hull Peas packaged and ready in new bags for shelves at local Walmart Stores in Mississippi (2014)

ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



Figure 19. Purple Hull Peas packaged and ready in clamshells for shelves at local stores in Mississippi with new labels (2013)



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or pawc@mytu.tuskegee.edu or www.pawc.info

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Walmart 
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Figure 20. Tuskegee University Walmart Preconference in 2012

ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



Figure 21. Elizabeth Myles, Dr. Franklin Chukwuma, Percy Baldwin and Dr. Magid Dagher present plaque to Carl Nicosia participant in the Walmart Buy Local Program



Figure 22. Local farmers and Alcorn State University staff attends tour at Kroger Delta Regional Warehouse in Memphis, TN with Martha Fuller, Delta Produce Merchandiser



Figure 23. Local farmers and Alcorn State University staff attends tour at Kroger Delta Regional Warehouse in Memphis, TN with Widget Development Company (Frances Martin far right and David Martin not pictured)

ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM FINAL REPORT



Alcorn

SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE, RESEARCH,
EXTENSION & APPLIED SCIENCES

Office of AREAS Communications
School of Agriculture, Research,
Extension and Applied Sciences

www.alcorn.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 18, 2014

Alcorn State University and Widget Development Trading Company Team up to Increase Farmers' Success in Local Food Markets

Alcorn State University's Mississippi Small Farm and Agribusiness Center (MSFAC) has joined forces with Frances and David Martin, owners of the Widget Development & Trading Company, LLC (Widget DTC) located in Montgomery, Alabama, to continue increasing the success of local farmers in conventional food markets by placing their produce into mainstream grocery stores.

"It is critical that farmers diversify their markets. It will give them an opportunity to receive multiple streams of income from profitable outlets," said Elizabeth Myles, marketing specialist with Alcorn's Mississippi Small Farm Agribusiness Center.

The current efforts of the project have been expanded to include increased produce offerings, as well as increased output of Alcorn's vegetable processing facility in Marks, Mississippi, which is operated by the Alcorn State University Extension Program. Widget DTC is working to establish marketing relationships, including meeting with buyers from Kroger and Winn Dixie, to expand the reach of the MSFAC and Alcorn.

The North Delta Produce Growers Association (NDPGA) located in the Mississippi Delta also has a vested interest in participating in this project. A group of farmers from the NDPGA, along with representatives from Alcorn and Widget DTC, had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Kroger and tour the refrigerated and cold storage areas of their Delta Division warehouse facility in Memphis, Tennessee. The meeting and the tour of the facility were arranged through the efforts of Kroger employees Martha Fuller, produce merchandiser, Jeffery Smith, produce quality manager, Teresa Dickerson, community affairs and PR manager, and Maxine Johnson, administrative assistant.

"The facility was large and impressive in its technology," shared Frances and David Martin of Widget DTC. "This rare opportunity was entertaining and enlightening."

-MORE-

**Figure 24. Alcorn State University Office of AREAS Communications Press Release on
Widget Development Trading Company, LLC**

ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

Fuller and Smith also expressed their excitement about establishing a relationship with NDPGA and look forward to seeing the produce from other farmers. Kroger customers have been very responsive to the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce's "Make Mine Mississippi" concept of locally-grown produce. They enjoy knowing where their food is coming from, especially considering that it is home-grown.

"Mississippi consumers are loyal to purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables," said the Widget representatives. "Widget DTC will establish a timeline for harvesting the produce at the quantities estimated by farmers based on production, planning and scheduling process. Once Kroger has this information, it can discuss the process of getting the produce into the warehouse."

The mainstream markets have expressed interest in vegetable crops already produced by Mississippi growers, such as: purple hull peas, butter beans, peanuts, and potatoes. They have also expressed interest in produce that can be packed in a marketable fashion, such as mixed bags of greens. Some newly proposed items include sweet potato, vine greens, and a package that contains fruits and vegetables to be processed into a drink, or smoothie.

The NDPGA conducted a meeting at the Trinity House of Prayer in Moorhead, Mississippi concerning the production of fall and spring vegetables. Percy Baldwin, plant manager of Alcorn's vegetable processing facility, chaired the meeting. The agenda included an introduction and presentation by Frances and David Martin, of the Widget DTC. About 45 farmers and interested individuals attended the meeting.

"Excitement abounds as we consider the possibilities of this new partnership with Widget DTC and other affiliates," said Myles. "We look forward to a prosperous and productive year in 2015 working with the Mississippi Delta farmers and other producers throughout the great state of Mississippi to find success with local food markets."

-END-

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Figure 25. (Page 2) Alcorn State University Office of AREAS Communications Press Release on Widget Development Trading Company, LLC

WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM



WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM

- FY 2012 USDA AMS (FEDERAL-STATE MARKETING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM) AND MDAC FUNDING
- HISTORY OF WALMART PROGRAM
- CRITERIA FOR PROGRAM
- SELECTION PROCESS
- TRAINING SCHEDULE



**Alcorn State University Relationship and
Communications with
Walmart and CH Robinson**



**C. H. ROBINSON VISIT MARKS VEGETABLE
PROCESSING PLANT ON JANUARY 15, 2008**

**Alcorn State University Relationship and
Communications Continues with
Walmart**



**TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY PRECONFERENCE
DECEMBER 1-2, 2012**

**WALMART BUY LOCAL PROJECT
IN MISSISSIPPI**



ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



"A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work." -Colin Powell



ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



ENABLING LOCAL FARMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WALMART BUY LOCAL PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT



OVER 42 WALMART STORES IN MISSISSIPPI RECEIVED PRODUCT





Alcorn®

Mississippi Small Farm Development Center

FACT SHEET

A Quick Reference Source

20 Tips for Successful Marketing

Look for ideas for possible things to grow

- Check with current or potential buyers (specialty distributors, restaurants, customers at farmers' markets, retail produce managers).
- Don't get swept away by every new possibility that comes along. Take each new idea and *EVALUATE* how each alternative matches your skills, preferences, and resources.

Match the farm venture to the risk you can handle

- *START SMALL*, and test your ability to grow and market new products before you scale up. Starting small also helps assure you'll produce a quality product, allowing you to protect yourself so that you don't get knocked out if your experiment fails.
- Set aside a certain percentage of your acreage or gross income each year to experiment with new products. Focus initially on producing a few selected specialties, and *ESTABLISH A REPUTATION FOR QUALITY* specialty products.

Know your Market

- *DO NOT PLANT BEFORE YOU KNOW WHO YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL BE.*
- Match your sales volume to the market.
- *PLAN AHEAD* and anticipate what you can sell to your outlets. There is nothing worse than producing crops, only to find that you can't sell them.
- Market analysis not only helps determine if your prospective enterprise can be

profitable, but also determines how you will promote and market your product.

Diversify your Enterprises and your Markets

- *DON'T PUT ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET.* If weather, pests, or a collapsed market wipe out one crop, you've got others to depend on.
- Another advantage of diversity is that once you've established connections with buyers, increasing the variety you offer them is a good way to increase overall volume they will accept from you.
- But there is a tradeoff: you may have to learn new production technologies, buy new equipment, and develop new markets.
- Diversifying markets can be simpler and more lucrative than diversifying production. Adding a farmers market to your marketing mix, going organic, or developing value-added products are examples of changing what you produce.

Translate trend into Profits

- *LOOK FOR NICHE MARKETS* through such trends as health and nutrition, smaller packages, more diverse and higher quality foods, quality and convenience, ethnic foods, foods for weight-conscious consumers as well as consumers as well as consumers concerned about food safety.
- Other trends include the demand for fresh, in-season, local produce as well as organic produce and cut flowers.

Specialty Crops

- *CONSIDER HIGH-VALUE CROPS*, plants that wholesalers may have overlooked because they require special handling.

Specialty Marketing

- The secret of high-value, specialty marketing is to *KNOW AHEAD OF TIME WHAT YOUR MARKET IS* and where it is going.
- *BE PREPARED TO CHANGE* with the seasons. Too many producers just go by

"The Alcorn State University Extension Program offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability."

what sold last year but most specialty buyers are constantly looking for something new.

- In case your high-end markets don't take all your premium produce, develop secondary outlets for your crops such as canning, processing, or selling at lower-end markets.

Grow and Market for Quality

- Some customers will pay the price you name for the quality they can't get elsewhere.
- Freshness: keep your products on the vine or tree as long as possible, then get them to the consumer as soon as possible after harvest.
- Variety: comb through specialty seed catalogs, searching for varieties that boost of excellence in flavor. Many specialty farmers grow their products of natural, enriched soil practices.
- *DON'T JEOPARDIZE YOUR TOP-PAYING MARKETS BY MIXING YOUR PREMIUM PRODUCTS WITH LESSER-GRADE PRODUCTS*- develop secondary outlets for your number two's and three's. Not everything you produce is marketable to the high-end market.
- Plant 10% more than what you plan to market.

Don't compete with everyone else

- The name of the game is niche marketing. Look for ways to differentiate your product, not only by what you grow, but how you grow it (organic): what you do with it (added value of processed products): or how you package or market the product. Ordinary spinach, for example, which is washed, cut, and bagged, as a ready to eat salad becomes a specialty item.
- Some other ways to differentiate your products include a service, such as home delivery or pre-washing.

Know your customers

- *BUSINESS FAILURES* are filled with businesses that attempted to market *WHAT THEY THOUGHT WOULD SELL, INSTEAD OF FINDING OUT FIRST WHAT WILL SELL*. Get to know your customers or buyers, why they purchase what they do, and what else they may like to purchase. Make it a habit to survey your customers. Ask for feedback.

- Send buyers new product samples and ask for feedback.
- Use small focus groups to gain insights on your new products.
- Use low-cost advertisements as a test promotion.

Aim for a year-round Supply

- Extend your harvest by planting different varieties with different harvest dates.
- Steady production stretched over a long growing season provides regular work, evens out cash flow, captures early and late season prices, and provides consistency of supply for the buyers.

Look for High-Return Marketing Outlets

- Many smaller growers choose direct marketing in order to increase revenue by cutting out the middlemen.
- Direct marketing is most likely to be successful for seasonal items or relatively high-value products (value-added or processed products).

Market Cooperatively

- *THERE IS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS*.
- Marketing associations or cooperatives exist to help market and promote growers' products.
- It pays to promote with your fellow grower.

Valued-Added

- Produce that may be worth cents per pound as a fresh market product may be worth dollars per pound as a processed product.
- Value added products create additional products for you to sell, enable you to market less than perfect produce as processed products, provide a source for year-round sales, and generate off-season work.
- Start small and build a solid local base before attempting to sell to larger or more distant markets

Educate the Consumer

- The more people know about your product and what went into growing it and how to

use it, the more they are willing to pay a premium price.

Pricing for Quality

- Offer a unique, high-quality product that customers can't get elsewhere.
- Emphasize freshness, quality and uniqueness rather than cheap food.
- Package expensive items in smaller units.
- Price competitively for common items, but slightly above the market or unusual or hard to find items where competition is less intense.
- Give samples in order to show quality.
- If and when you make upward price adjustments, make them a little as needed rather than all at once.

Information Resources

- To make sound marketing decisions, you need up-to-date, accurate and reliable information.

Take time to relax and have fun

- In the long run, you will actually work more effectively and profitably by not working seven days a week.

Always give something

- Remember that word-of-mouth really takes off when you do something extraordinary. Customers expect the basics. Think of Cracker jacks and chances are you will remember the tiny little toy in the bottom of the box.

Source: *“Sell What You Sow! The Grower’s Guide to Successful Produce Marketing.” By Eric Gibson*

**When all else fails, make lemonade out of lemons!!
If you don’t plan, you plan to fail!!!!**

**Elizabeth B. Myles, M.S.
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Alcorn State University
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www.alcorn.edu/outreach/sfdc/index.htm



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ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY
Mississippi Small Farm Development Center
Marketing Program



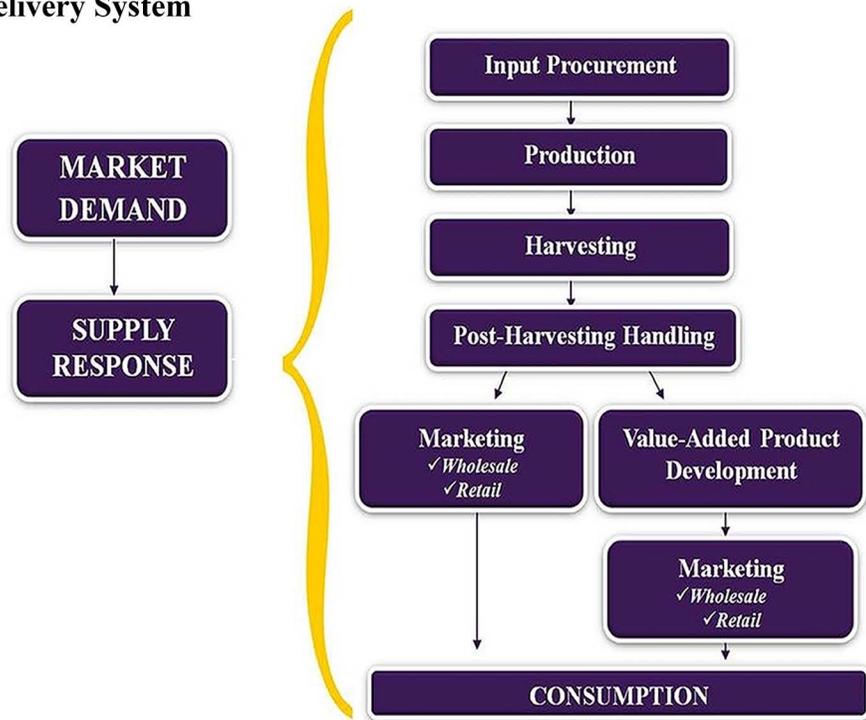


Overview of The Mississippi Small Farm Development Center

Marketing is very important to the success of agricultural enterprises but is often neglected in the planning stages of new ventures. Before capital is spent to develop a new enterprise, it is vital to determine if adequate demand exists for the products or services. Although the demand for fresh produce is increasing, producers lack the time and are deficient in the skills to identify these new markets and to successfully negotiate and deliver on marketing opportunities and contracts. If strong demand exists, then strategies should be developed to supply products or services to meet this demand. The overall goal of the Marketing Program is for producers to understand the importance of planning for each market and having strategies to reduce the impact of uncertainties or risks that affect their farm businesses.

This program provides educational resources to improve farm business management skills so that producers can increase their income. The program offers producers and cooperatives valuable information on identifying wholesale and retail markets, building relationships with buyers, packaging and labeling products properly, negotiating and delivering products to buyers in compliance with the marketing contract specifications, transportation logistics, securing decent prices, and promotion/advertising, therefore enhancing sales and profit. The Marketing Program provides workshops and training's on the above mentioned educational resources. The program fosters an inter-disciplinary approach by working with other units at Alcorn State University that include the Extension Program, Family and Consumer Sciences, WPRL 91.7 FM, Agricultural Economics and various centers on and off campus. The program offers steps in developing effective marketing plans with specific information on how to reduce risks.

Food Delivery System



Food Delivery System cont'd

Successful marketing is achieved most often when tied to other key functions in the food delivery system or value chain. A common construct of this system developed by the Mississippi Small Farm Development Center entails initially identifying effective demand for a product followed by a supply response. Then, the farmer procures the relevant resources for production. Next, the farmer combines the resources by employing processes that yield consistently optimal output. When the crop is ripe or ready, harvesting occurs. Post-harvest handling follows and typically involves gathering, transporting, storing, washing, sorting, grading, packing and shipping. The primary or value-added product enters either the wholesale or retail market. Of course, final sale occurs at the retail level where consumers purchase the product for final consumption.

- Buy Fresh Buy Local
Marketing Opportunities for
Limited Resource Farmers
- Restaurants
 - Farmers Markets
 - Grocers
 - Churches
 - Institutions
 - Roadside Markets
 - On-Farm Sales
 - CSA's - Community Supported Agriculture
 - Flea Markets
 - Pick Your Own
 - Farm Stands
 - Caterers
 - Nursing Homes
 - Online Sales

Marketing Program Partnerships:



Make Mine Mississippi
Make Mine Mississippi, is a marketing program of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.



Walmart
-Increase access to commercial markets (e.g. Walmart, Krogers, Whole Foods)
-Increase profits & build capacity of small farmers
-Enhance sustainability of small farmers' operations and quality of life
-Develop and strengthen cooperatives in Mississippi



Mississippi Market Maker
The program assists Mississippi agricultural producers in finding markets for their commodities and in providing an important link between producers and consumers.



Wallace Center - Winrock International
Work engages limited resource farmers in Mississippi to strengthen their capacity to meet the fresh produce supply needs of wholesale markets; institutions; and food service buyers; and to facilitate their success in accessing new markets by developing supply chain relationships.

WHAT'S INSIDE →



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1st Edition | March 2013

NORTH DELTA PRODUCE GROWERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



WALMART BUY LOCAL INITIATIVE

The 2012 Walmart buy-local initiative is where Walmart purchases locally grown purple hull peas from small Mississippi farmers and sells them in the fresh produce departments of their local stores. It has been a great one for Mississippi Delta farmers, Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility, North Delta Producer Growers Association's producer-members and other small, socially disadvantaged agricultural producers. North Delta Produce Growers Association have delivered over 13,000 (18 oz. clamshells) of purple hull peas with great quality and no rejections to the Wal-Mart Distribution Center in New Albany, MS. C.H. Robinson Worldwide (a third-party provider) assisted with the transportation logistics. The clamshells were placed in over fifty (50) stores throughout Mississippi.

The Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility partnered with the local Department of Human Services to employ six individuals to assist with the Walmart Purple Hull pea project to start enhancing economic development in the delta region. The local farmers were pleased with the



Dr. McAfee with Walmart Truck at loading dock.

price per shelled bushel that they received on last year and they are looking forward to increasing acreage for the 2013 program.

Local sourcing supports this nutrition

initiative in two important ways. First, by sourcing products from regions closer to their point of sale, we're able to reduce the miles that products have to travel, and in turn, cut transportation costs out of the supply chain. We can then pass those savings along to customers. This is one way we have been able to save customers more than \$1 billion on fresh fruits and vegetables. Today, Walmart gets watermelons from 27 states; cantaloupes from 19 states; pumpkins from 26 states; strawberries from 11 States; blueberries from 15 states; apples from 23 states; citrus from 6 states; pears from 6 states; stonefruit from 17 states; potatoes from 25 states. All in all, we're sourcing locally from 41 states across the U.S.—Ron McCormick, Senior Director, Sustainable Agriculture Produce, Floral and Local Sourcing Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Hats off to our Mississippi Delta farmers that participated in the 2012 Walmart buy-

"WALMART" continued on page 2

“WALMART” continued from page 1

local initiative and the Alcorn State University Vegetable Processing Facility staff under the leadership of Percy Baldwin, Facility Manager, a job well done! Working together, we see the possibility of doing so much more.

For more information on the Wal-Mart “Buy Local” Program, please contact Mrs. Elizabeth B. Myles at 601.877.3947 or emyles@alcorn.edu.



(L) Mr. Holmes & (R) Percy Baldwin, Facility Manager



Peas, Clamshells and Make Mine Mississippi Logo



Percy Baldwin in ASU Vegetable Processing facility

FARM to SCHOOL



C.W. “Doc” Davis at Mound Bayou School District

It’s lunchtime in the Mississippi Delta and in Clarksdale-area cafeterias students are happily tearing into fresh, baked sweet potatoes. No need for any fancy prep – tin foil and oven heat did the trick.

Delta producer C.W. “Doc” Davis (President, North Delta Produce Growers Association) delivered the fresh spuds – 3,000 pounds worth to seven schools in the Coahoma County and Mound Bayou school districts. As part of the recently-launched “Farm to School” effort, Davis will fill the same order several more times. And in doing so, a circle of benefits will be kept intact and fostered.

“Everyone wins,” says Ryan Betz, coordinator of the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative (DFFI). “Students are fed wholesome, local produce and educated on where their food comes from. The farmer makes money. The school districts are able to meet mandated nutrition guidelines and the overall community benefits.”

Davis’ delivery coincides with Mississippi’s inaugural Farm to School Week, which falls the first week of October. One reason for the push to promote healthier meals: the state’s children rank first in obesity in the country.

And farmers can be excited about the effort because of the market it helps open. Over 17 million meals are served in Mississippi Delta schools annually. Betz estimates that the Delta produce market for schools is between \$15 million and \$20 million annually.

Delta Fresh Foods Initiative



Several years ago, the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative kicked off following a “huge conference involving anyone around the Mississippi Delta interested in developing a food system within our region,” says Betz. After picking through notes and ideas brought to the conference, “we slowly began to shape and develop that food system. Really, this effort revolves around a group of committed individuals and partnering organizations, a network.”

The DFFI mission is working to create

community-based, sustainable food systems that enhance the local food economy while encouraging healthier lifestyles.

“We don’t really have a central location. However, for the time being, our physical sponsor is Delta Health Alliance in Stoneville. Right now, we’re working to create our non-profit status. All that paperwork has been done and is now in process.”

Following several years of gestation, DFFI began its work in earnest last April. “We didn’t get involved with the schools until

July. But we’ve been working with two really receptive school districts – Mound Bayou and Coahoma County.”

Between just those two districts, over 725,000 meals are served to students annually.

In both districts, Betz says food service directors “have been incredibly supportive and excited about providing fresh produce to students. It hasn’t been a challenge to get them to use things like sweet potatoes.”

The growers DFFI have worked with have dealt directly with the Coahoma County and Mound Bayou schools. “That cuts out the middleman and helps provide farmers with a bit more money, which helps them to build and expand their operations.”

Under the Mississippi Department of Education there is already a statewide farm-to-school program. However, “they mainly deal with larger growers – and that’s fantastic. But for smaller growers that don’t produce the volume that the state program needs, it makes more sense for them to provide produce for one school district at a time.”

Source: URL:<http://deltafarmpress.com/management/delta-fresh-foods-initiative-links-healthy-food-and-delta-schools> October 10, 2012

New Conservation Initiative Assists Specialty Crop Producers



NRCS State Conservationist Homer Wilkes

JACKSON, Jan. 11, 2013 – A new initiative in Mississippi aims to encourage specialty crop producers to make conservation improvements to their operations. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance to help these producers enhance their farms while cleaning and conserving water and improving soil.

This initiative, part of NRCS’ Environmental

Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), offers about \$500,000 to Mississippi specialty crop producers, such as growers of potatoes, greens, beans, peas, pecans, blueberries and fruit trees. Growers of cotton, soybeans, peanuts and other recognized commodity crops are not eligible.

“We want to engage Mississippi’s specialty crop growers and encourage them to use conservation to boost production and improve the quality of our waterways and soil,” NRCS State Conservationist Homer Wilkes said.

Applications are due by Jan. 18 for the first ranking period. April 19 is the deadline for the second ranking period.

Assistance through this initiative will help producers install terraces, buffers and efficient irrigation systems, plant cover crops and implement other conservation activities.

All participants must meet conservation program eligibility requirements to

receive financial assistance. This initiative places special emphasis on historically underserved producers during the ranking of applications.

For more information, contact your local field office or visit our website.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps America’s farmers and ranchers conserve the Nation’s soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

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USDA Finalizes New Microloan Program

Microloans up to \$35,000 aim to assist small farmers, veterans, and disadvantaged producers



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15, 2013 — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a new microloan program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) designed to help small and family operations, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers secure loans under \$35,000. The new microloan program is aimed at bolstering the progress of producers through their start-up years by providing needed resources and helping to increase equity so that farmers may eventually graduate to commercial credit and expand their operations. The microloan program will also provide a less burdensome, more simplified application process in comparison to traditional farm loans.

"I have met several small and beginning

farmers, returning veterans and disadvantaged producers interested in careers in farming who too often must rely on credit cards or personal loans with high interest rates to finance their start-up operations," said Vilsack. "By further expanding access to credit to those just starting to put down roots in farming, USDA continues to help grow a new generation of farmers, while ensuring the strength of an American agriculture sector that drives our economy, creates jobs, and provides the most secure and affordable food supply in the world."

The new microloans, said Vilsack, represent how USDA continues to make year-over-year gains in expanding credit opportunities for minority, socially-disadvantaged and young and beginning farmers and ranchers across the United States. The final rule establishing the microloan program will be published in the Jan. 17 issue of the Federal Register.

Administered through USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) Operating Loan Program, the new microloan program offers credit options and solutions to a variety of producers. FSA has a long history of providing agricultural credit to the nation's farmers and ranchers through its Operating Loan Program. In assessing its programs, FSA evaluated the needs of smaller farm operations and any unintended barriers to obtaining financing. For beginning farmers and ranchers, for instance, the new microloan program offers a simplified loan application process. In addition, for those who want to grow niche crops to sell directly to ethnic markets and farmers markets, the microloan program offers a path to obtain financing. For past FSA Rural

Youth Loan recipients, the microloan program provides a bridge to successfully transition to larger-scale operations.

Since 2009, USDA has made a record amount of farm loans through FSA—more than 128,000 loans totaling nearly \$18 billion. USDA has increased the number of loans to beginning farmers and ranchers from 11,000 loans in 2008 to 15,000 loans in 2011. More than 40 percent of USDA's farm loans now go to beginning farmers. In addition, USDA has increased its lending to socially-disadvantaged producers by nearly 50 percent since 2008.

Producers can apply for a maximum of \$35,000 to pay for initial start-up expenses such as hoop houses to extend the growing season, essential tools, irrigation, delivery vehicles, and annual expenses such as seed, fertilizer, utilities, land rents, marketing, and distribution expenses. As their financing needs increase, applicants can apply for an operating loan up to the maximum amount of \$300,000 or obtain financing from a commercial lender under FSA's Guaranteed Loan Program.

USDA farm loans can be used to purchase land, livestock, equipment, feed, seed, and supplies, or be to construct buildings or make farm improvements. Small farmers often rely on credit cards or personal loans, which carry high interest rates and have less flexible payment schedules, to finance their operations. Expanding access to credit, USDA's microloan will provide a simple and flexible loan process for small operations.

Producers interested in applying for a microloan may contact their local Farm Service Agency office. Contact: Office of Communications 202-720-4623.

USDA-FSA Reminders: Sign up for ACRE/DCP Underway

The sign-up period for the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program (DCP) and the Average Crop Revenue Election Program (ACRE) began Feb. 19. Changes to this year's program allow producers to choose to enroll in either program. Originally, producers who signed up for ACRE could not move out of the program for at least five years. With the extension of the 2008 Farm Bill, those rules have changed, giving farmers an option to move out of ACRE into DCP or vice versa. Read more about DCP and ACRE or contact a local county office to sign up.

USDA Announces 45th General Sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct a four-week general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), beginning May 20 and ending on June 14. CRP has a 27-year legacy of protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States.

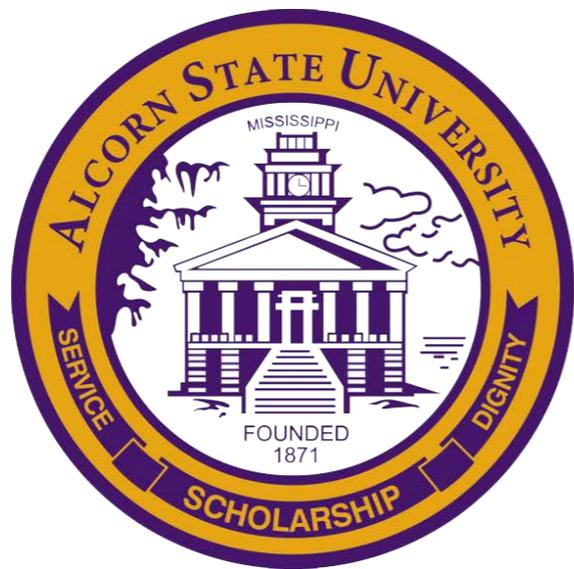
Currently, about 27 million acres are enrolled in CRP. Producers that are accepted in the sign-up can receive cost-share assistance to plant long-term, resource-conserving covers and receive an annual rental payment for the

length of the contract (10-15 years).

Contracts on 3.3 million acres of CRP are set to expire on Sept. 30, 2013. Producers with expiring contracts or producers with environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP.

Additional sign-ups for continuous CRP programs such as Highly Erodible Land Initiative and Initiative to Restore Grasslands, Wetlands and Wildlife will be announced in spring 2013.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, visit a local FSA service center or www.fsa.usda.gov.



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**Effective Marketing Fresh Produce and Related
Value-Added Products by
Limited Resource Farmers**

**FINANCE, PRODUCTION, PROCESSING AND
MARKETING WORKSHOP**

Thursday, March 7, 2013

North Delta Produce Growers Association

Elizabeth B. Myles, Marketing Specialist

Mississippi Small Farm Development Center



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State University

ALCORN
STATE
UNIVERSITY



Alcorn
State University



EXTENSION & RESEARCH COMPLEX



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OVERVIEW



Alcorn
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- **Market Planning: Where to Start**
- **Effective Marketing Tools and Strategies**
- **Diversifying Your Markets**
- **Value Added**
- **Successful Value Added Projects in Mississippi**

FOOD DELIVERY SYSTEM



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Identify Demand for Product

**MARKET
DEMAND**

**SUPPLY
RESPONSE**

Input Procurement

Procure resources: land, capital, equipment, supplies, seeds, etc.

Production

Determine Enterprise for Planting

Harvesting

Labor crew manual or mechanical to gather product

Post-Harvesting Handling

Washing, sorting, grading, packing, storage, shipping/delivery (DSD)

Marketing
✓ Wholesale
✓ Retail

Value-Added Product Development

Processing methods for convenience

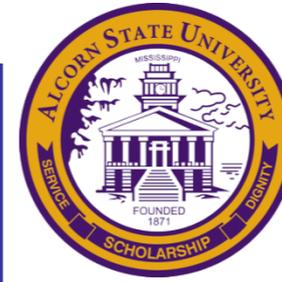
Marketing
✓ Wholesale
✓ Retail

CONSUMPTION

*Source: Mississippi Small Farm Development Center
Alcorn State University*



MARKET PLANNING



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- **Those who do not plan, they are planning to fail**
- **Failure to do market research and the lack of a sound business/farm/marketing plan are leading causes for failure**
- **Develop a business and marketing plan with realistic sales forecasts and target prices**
- **Market research helps you understand the consumer demand: what types of products they want, who will buy them at what price, your competition...survey your customers**

EFFECTIVE MARKETING

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES



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- **Form or join a marketing cooperative to enhance prices and guarantee a market**
- **Increase direct marketing efforts to capture a higher price**
- **Market through multiple channels or outlets to reduce reliance on a single market – Never count on one buyer**
- **Have a quality and consistent product**
- **Communicate with your buyer**
- **Know your product---tell your story**

EFFECTIVE MARKETING

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES



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- **Develop a logo**
- **Business Cards**
- **Brochures/Leaflets**
- **Websites**
- **Newsletters**
- **Radio—PSA (Public Service Announcement)**
- **Newspaper Ads**
- **Shirts**
- **Hats**
- **Pens, Cups/Mugs**
- **Videos**
- **Facebook, Twitter, Etc.**

USDA ECONOMIC RESEARCH
SERVICE –
REPORT #128, NOVEMBER 2011



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- ❖ “Marketing of local foods via both direct-to-consumer and intermediated channels grossed **\$4.8 billion in 2008...**”
- ❖ “For local foods production to continue to grow, **marketing channels and supply chain infrastructure must deepen.**”

FARMER

MARKETING CHANNELS



\$0.158

\$0.842

Spent on Processing, transportation, advertising, packaging, etc. (than actual growing it)

DIVERSIFYING YOUR MARKETS

- Restaurants
 - Independent
 - Chain
- Farmers Markets
- Institutions
 - Hospitals
 - Schools
 - Prisons
- Grocers
- Roadside Markets
- On Farm Sales
- CSA's Community Supported Agriculture
- Flea Markets
- Pick Your Own
- Farm Stands
- Caterers
- Online Sales



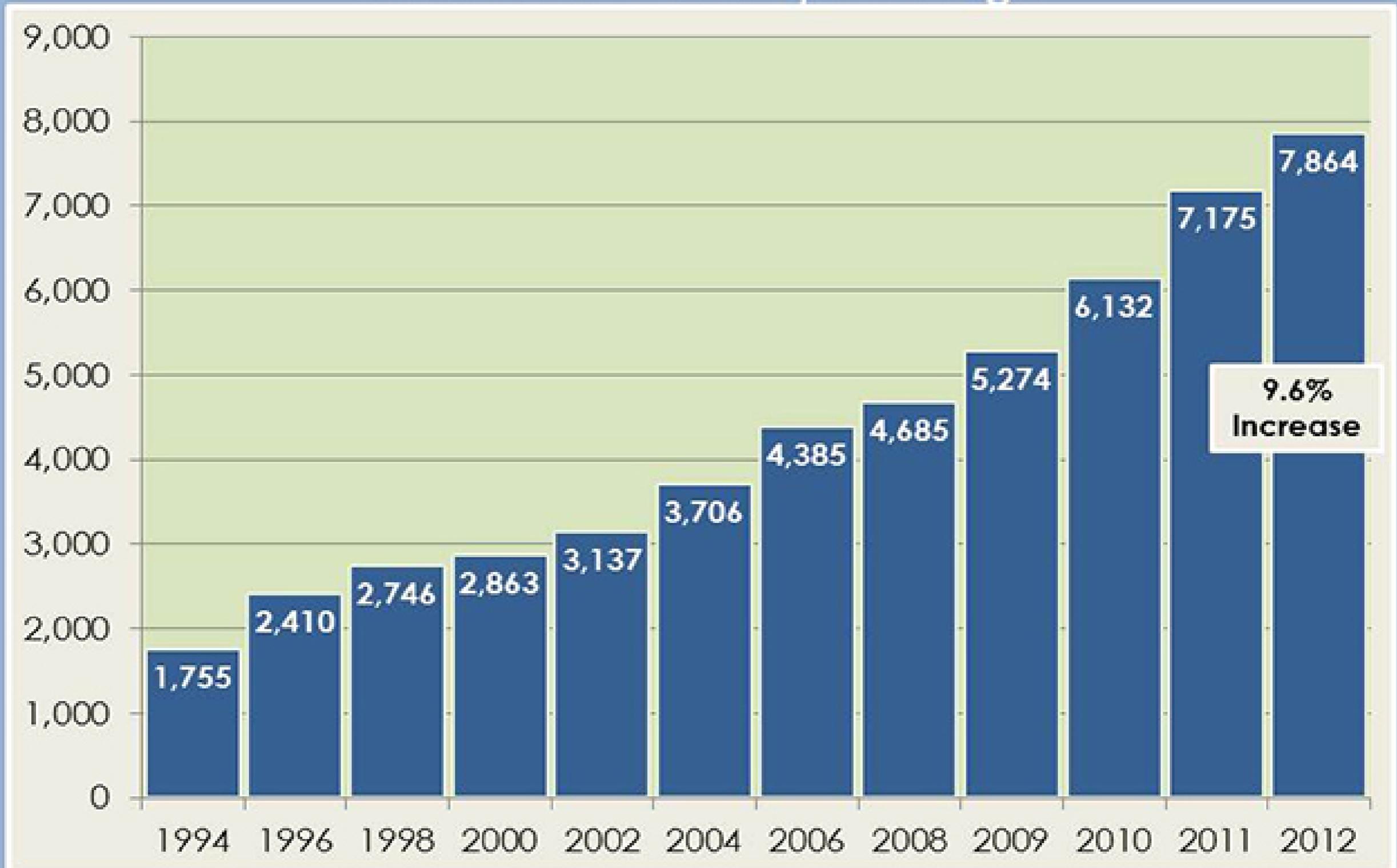
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National Count of Farmers Market Directory Listings



Source: USDA-AMS-Marketing Services Division

Direct marketing fruits, vegetables, meats, canned goods, baked goods, nursery products and more

ORANGES

LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCE

Smoothies:

Strawberry • Blueberry
Mango • Banana • Peach
Chocolate • Pineapple

Milkshakes:

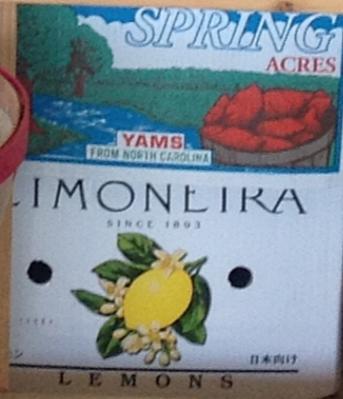
Strawberry • Blueberry
Banana • Peanut Butter
Chocolate • Pineapple • Mango
Coconut • Coffee • Peach

STRAWBERRY SQUASH



EVERYDAY FRESH FRUITS & VEGETABLES

LOCALLY GROWN





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- ❖ Locally sources meats and seafood
- ❖ Locally grown produce*****
- ❖ Children's nutrition
- ❖ Sustainable seafood
- ❖ Simplicity / back-to-basics
- ❖ Farm-branded ingredients

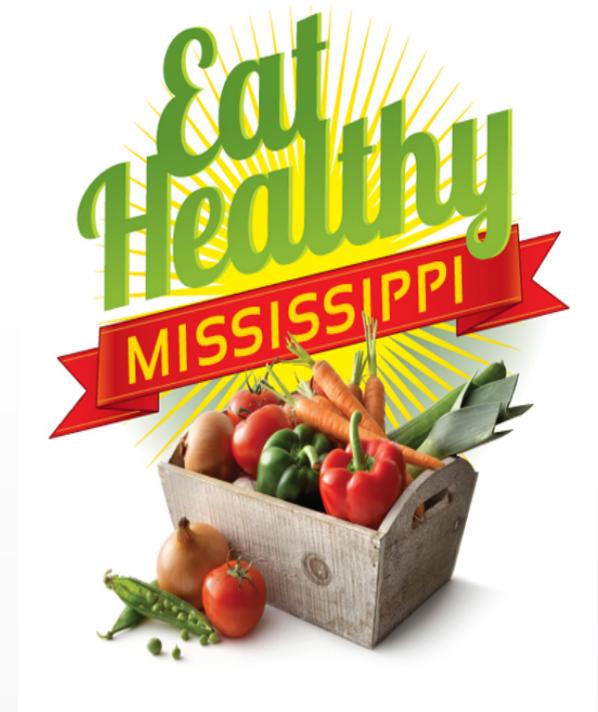
NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
“WHAT’S HOT IN 2011”

EAT HEALTHY MISSISSIPPI



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- ❖ Gained National Attention
- ❖ Promotes Local and Fresh Produce
- ❖ Build long lasting relationships with local chefs
- ❖ Complete Notice of Growers Intent



DEFINITION OF VALUE ADDED PRODUCTION



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Value Added Production

Means processing methods and packaging to enhance the nutrition and shelf life of a farm product for *convenience.*

Value-added Examples



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Commodity

Milk



Strawberries



Composted Farm
Wastes



Tomatoes/Peppers



Farm



Timber



Value-added Product

Bottled Milk/Cheese

Strawberry Preserves

Packaged Soil
Conditioner

Hot Sauce/Salsa

Agritourism

Flooring & Moulding

SUCCESSFUL VALUE ADDED PROJECTS IN MISSISSIPPI



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Southern Peas

Fresh Greens

Shiitake Mushrooms

G & M Goat Farm

SOUTHERN PEAS



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FRESH GREENS



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State University



FRESH GREENS



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State University



FRESH GREENS



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FRESH GREENS



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SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS



Alcorn

State University



SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS



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**Pounds of mushrooms sold:
40,554**

**Sales of mushrooms:
\$214,795 sold to brokers,
restaurants, farmers markets
and grocers**

G & M GOAT FARMS



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Morris and Gloria Richardson Wiggins, MS
“We're the only producers licensed by the State of Mississippi to sell goat meat wholesale.”

G & M GOAT FARMS



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- ***NEW! USDA Inspected Fresh Lamb Meat Products***
- **<http://msgoatlady.com/>**



CONTACT INFORMATION



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State University



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4-17-2014

A Case Study Analysis of a Regional Food System: The Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Program

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A Case Study Analysis of a Regional Food System: The Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Program

Authors

Tasha M. Hargrove, Walter A. Hill, John Brown, Miles Robinson, Iris Cole-Crosby, Elizabeth Myles, Billy Lawton, and Karla Martin

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF A REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM: THE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE CONSORTIUM FOR HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED FARMERS PROGRAM

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Abstract

The Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Program (SACH) was designed to carry out an experiment by five 1890 Land-Grant Universities in partnership with five farmer based cooperatives in five states to assess marketing fruits and vegetables to Walmart from a regional perspective. Using the Consortium as a case study, this study examined the Consortium within the framework of implementation evaluation. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The study answered the questions such as, what did the Consortium do, and what were some of the accomplishments of the Consortium? Consequently, farmers were able to: negotiate price points; develop a cold chain management system; properly package and store produce; and cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship with the buyer. The benefits derived from the Consortium included: providing supplemental income for the participating farmers; expansion of the existing regional food system; and promotion of good farm management practices.

Key Words: Historically Disadvantaged Farmers, Regional Food Systems, Collaborative Marketing, 1890 Land-Grant Universities, Small Farmers and Commercial Markets

Introduction

Historically disadvantaged farmers have been trying to penetrate commercial markets for decades. Regardless of their race or socioeconomic backgrounds; historically disadvantaged farmers face the traditional on-farm and off-farm challenges that have plagued most small farmers. Individually, they have lacked the volume and consistent supply necessary to attract buyers from commercial, wholesale, and retail markets. These farmers have also had limited access to capital and facilities to store, process, and distribute their products. The lack of distribution infrastructure and services make it difficult for this group of farmers to take advantage of the growing demand for locally and regionally grown foods in larger volume markets such as grocery stores, universities, restaurants, military bases, and hospitals (Barham et al., 2012).

A major challenge that historically disadvantaged farmers face is competition from large farms that produce at industrial scale levels. Large farmers with greater production and access to capital can invest in new techniques to make their products “market ready.” Historically, disadvantaged farmers have not had the production volume needed to utilize advance packing and handling techniques and find it difficult to access mass markets (Bragg, n.d.; Cantor and

Stronchlic, 2009). Due to their small scale of production, historically disadvantaged farmers have been unable to obtain the low production input costs that large farmers achieve through large-scale production and lower cost per unit of associated inputs (e.g., fertilizer, pesticides, seeds, packaging, and transportation). The combination of higher costs per unit of inputs and relatively low quantities produced makes it extremely difficult for historically disadvantaged farmers to compete in commercial markets (Black Belt Family Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Center Business Plan, 2006).

Additionally, historically disadvantaged farmers have encountered a myriad of on-farm challenges including inadequate irrigation systems, maintaining the cold chain needed to extend produce shelf life, availability of labor, and meeting food safety standards (Cantor and Stronchlic, 2009). According to Hill et al. (2014) many of the challenges that have faced historically disadvantaged farmers can be characterized as a social justice issue. This social justice issue is due to a history of slavery, sharecropping, land loss, lack of access to capital and profitable markets; as well as discrimination by USDA agencies. Despite the obstacles and the challenges they have faced, historically disadvantaged farmers are a tenacious group and are resilient in their pursuit of sustainability and the enhancement of their quality of life.

The long-term prosperity and competitiveness of historically disadvantaged farmers is dependent on these farmers working collaboratively, coordinating their marketing efforts, engaging in value-added activities, incorporating specialty enterprises into their farming operations, and basing their marketing decisions on reliable, up-to date information. Aggregation will also play a role in the survival of historically disadvantaged farmers. Aggregation is the collection of agricultural products from a number of area farms at a central hub (Wallace Center, 2012). Aggregation through regional food systems will give historically disadvantaged farmers a competitive advantage over medium and large farms. According to a study completed jointly by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity et al. (2012), food hubs have emerged as critical players in establishing and building strong local and regional food systems.

Regional food hubs are the key for historically disadvantaged farmers to reach wholesale and commercial markets. Barham et al. (2012, p. 4) defined a regional food hub as “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.” A regional food system can not only satisfy the demand for locally grown food, but also increase farmer income and create jobs (Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity et al., 2012). Food hubs can (1) increase market access for local and regional producers, (2) add value to the current food distribution system, and (3) have significant economic, social, and environmental impacts within the communities (Barham et al., 2012). Another strategy for historically disadvantaged farmers to penetrate commercial markets is to utilize non-traditional marketing tactics. These tactics include working closely with 1890 Land Grant Universities by participating in non-traditional sustainability initiatives aimed at sourcing locally grown products to commercial markets. An example of such an opportunity is Walmart’s Heritage Agriculture Initiative (Walmart, 2010).

The Evolution of the Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Program

On October 14, 2010, Walmart unveiled its global sustainable agriculture goals. The key component of this Initiative was the concept of supporting local farmers and their communities. Walmart outlined three core areas: (1) sell \$1 billion globally in food sourced directly from small, medium, and local farmers; (2) provide training to 1 million farmers and farm workers in such areas as crop selection and sustainable farming practices; and (3) raise the income of farmers it sources from 10 to 15 percent. Walmart also stated that they would double the sales of locally sourced produce. This included the sales from its Heritage Agriculture Program, which reintroduces the cultivation of produce by small- and women-owned farms and works with larger growers to expand their operations to Walmart's distribution network (Walmart, 2010).

McCormick and Pinkston (2009) summarized Walmart's anticipated results for the Heritage Agriculture Program. They stated that Walmart's anticipated results at the local level included: (a) create current supply chain visibility to local and regional sources, (b) develop new local and regional sources, (c) market local to Walmart customers and educate on benefits, and (d) improve freshness with less road time and lead time. They also indicated that Walmart would focus on ethnic items. This included items that are popular with the U.S.'s growing minority communities.

The Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers Program (SACH), also referred to as the "Consortium", was designed as part of the Walmart Heritage Agriculture Program. SACH initially included five partners: (1) Alcorn State University (MS); (2) Fort Valley State University (GA); (3) Prairie View A & M University (TX); (4) Tuskegee University (AL); and (5) University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (AR). Also, SACH initially started as a project, and the official project period was from February 1, 2012 to December 31, 2013 (Hill et al., 2012); however, a pilot project was initiated in 2011 in Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi. The pilot project formed a collaborative partnership between historically disadvantaged farmers, 1890 Land Grant Universities, and retail partners (e.g. Walmart, C.H. Robinson). The goal was to assist small farmers with the sale of their produce to commercial markets. This partnership resulted in improvements in production and harvesting, learning commercial grading and packaging techniques, and facilitating pick-up and delivery of produce. Examples of activities learned and improved during 2011 included:

- negotiating fair and profitable prices,
- agreement of acres to be planted and harvested,
- implementation of cultural practices that optimize yield and quality and meet food safety standards,
- packaging and controlling the produce environment temperature, and
- coordinating efficient delivery schedules with Walmart distribution centers (Hill et al., 2012).

The overall goal of SACH was to bridge the gap between the ability of historically disadvantaged farmers to grow vegetables and fruits and their ability to pack and market their produce in a manner that results in enhanced profits and quality of life. A secondary goal was

to develop a region-wide consortium that leverages the strengths of each partner in a manner that would build the capacity of small, socially and historically disadvantaged (underserved, minority, women and beginning) farmers to work together in organizing and marketing produce such that sustainability of their agricultural operations is enhanced. In addition, SACH sought to increase access to commercial markets and develop and strengthen cooperatives. The opportunities that was envisioned for farmers participating in the Consortium included: (1) having access to a guaranteed market, (2) ability to market collaboratively, (3) hands-on training in food safety, cold chain management, value-added processing, record keeping, and transportation, (4) increased farm incomes, and (5) access to good farm management practices (Hill et al., 2012).

A review of 1890 collaborative programming efforts revealed that 1890 Land Grant Universities have been engaged in the development of regional food systems since the late 1990s. The “Collaborative Research and Outreach for Small Farm Enterprises and Community Development in the Black Belt South” is an example of one of the collaborative efforts by 1890 Land Grant Universities. This project was a competitive grant and part of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems Program (IFAFS) (Hargrove and Hill, 2014). The objectives of this IFAFS’s project were to (1) develop and enhance a regional vegetable and fruit marketing system and build capacity and collaboration among farmers and farm-related enterprises, community based organizations and university outreach, (2) create opportunities for small and minority producers to access higher profits by increasing their participation in the meat goat/small livestock industry, and (3) form a collaborative link between the Southern Food Systems Education Consortium (SOFSEC) and the Southern Rural Development Initiative (SRDI), that is based on the sharing of each organization’s strengths for the creation of long-term benefits for small farmers and related businesses in the Black Belt Region of the South (Hargrove and Hill, 2014).

The ultimate goal of IFAFS’s regional marketing system was to enable small-scale farmers throughout the region to market as a unit, securing a larger share of commercial market, and at the same time, develop, enhance, and effectively compete in local markets. The regional marketing system sought the development of a central marketing hub which was located in South Central Georgia and two satellite hubs in Arkansas and Alabama. In addition, the IFAFS project provided opportunities for farmers in the Southeast to collaboratively engage in farm to school efforts through an existing production and distribution system (Hargrove and Hill, 2014). In summary, the IFAFS project utilized a regional approach to serve its targeted clientele and share best practices. It focused on building the capacity of small farmers and rural communities in the poorest counties of the Black Belt South to engage in sustainable development. IFAFS was able to accomplish this through the provision of technical assistance, developing human and financial capital, disseminating information, and providing hands-on realistic educational training to producers in the areas of goat production, vegetable production, business management training, and marketing (Hargrove and Hill, 2014). There were 14 participating organizations in the IFAFS project. Table 1 provides a list of the IFAFS participants. SACH evolved out of the work of the IFAFS project and built on some of the findings of this historical project.

Table 1. Institutions Participating in the IFAFS Project

Organization	State
Alabama A& M University	Alabama
Alcorn State University	Mississippi
Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation	Arkansas
CMC Farmers' Cooperative	North Carolina
Federation of Southern Cooperatives	Georgia
Florida A & M University	Florida
Fort Valley State University	Georgia
North Carolina A & T University	North Carolina
North Carolina Coalition of Farm and Rural Families	North Carolina
Penn Center	South Carolina
South Carolina State University	South Carolina
Southern University A & M University	Louisiana
Tuskegee University	Alabama
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	Arkansas

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of the procedures used in the implementation and delivery of technical and outreach assistance to farmers participating in SACH. Using the Consortium as the case study, the study examined the projects within the framework of implementation evaluation. Implementation evaluation involves finding out what is happening in the program, what the program consists of, what are the program's key characteristics, and what is working and what is not working (Patton, 2012). Process evaluation is one of several types of implementation evaluations; "process evaluation focuses on the internal dynamics and actual operations of the program and attempts to understand its strengths and weaknesses" (Patton, 2012, p. 201) Process evaluation provides answers to questions such as (a) what did the program do, (b) how well did the program staff do it, (c) what is happening and why, (d) how do the parts of the program fit together, and (e) how did the participants experience the program (Patton, 2012)? This study answered the questions: what are the key characteristics of the Consortium as a whole and as individual projects; what did the Consortium do, how well did the individual projects fit together, and what were some of the accomplishments of the Consortium?

Methods

Data Collection

The data for the study were collected using the qualitative case study methodological approach, which included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a set of interactions with case study participants during three 2-day conferences. This last step is referred to by Lev and Stevenson (2011) as learning across value chains and follows a community of practice approach. The data collection period extended from February 2012 to February 2014. Six site visits were completed in each state. Twenty semi-structured interviews were completed with members of the Consortium.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the within-case technique and the crossed-case technique. The within-case technique treated each project as a comprehensive case in and of itself (Merriam, 1998), while the crossed-case technique built general explanations that fitted each of the individual projects, but the projects varied in details. These two techniques are consistent with the approaches recommended by Yin (1994) and Merriam (1998) when analyzing case study data. In order to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research design, several techniques were employed including mechanically recoding the data, member-checking, triangulation, and maintaining a reflective journal.

Results

What are the Key Characteristics of the Consortium as a Whole?

SACH evolved out of a need to enhance market opportunities for historically disadvantaged farmers in the targeted states. This overarching goal was accomplished by strengthening each of the farmers and their respective farmer organizations. A review of the findings indicated that; the five projects varied in their implementation process, organizational structure, produce grown, volumes of sales, prices received for the products, number of farmers participating in the projects, and infrastructure.

Tuskegee University served as the lead and administrative institution for the Consortium. The four remaining universities were collaborating partners. The Consortium was structured in a manner where each university worked closely at improving each farmer's strategic position individually as well as collaboratively in the regional food system. The participating cooperatives included: Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperative, East Arkansas Enterprise Cooperative, Inc., North Delta Produce Growers Association, Synergy Cooperative, and Costal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative. In addition, individual farmers were also selected to participate in the project from Texas and Arkansas. Requirements for participation also varied across the individual projects. The general criteria included prior experience producing the targeted crops, access to irrigation, access to land, and willingness to participate in an extensive technical and outreach program.

Rather than pursue multiple commercial markets during the project period, the Consortium focused on assisting farmers with sourcing their local products to one retailer, Walmart. The primary focus was on purple hull peas. Two additional crops, watermelons and collard greens, were also selected as secondary crops. During the project period, three of the Consortium's members were able to collaboratively market their produce to local Walmart distribution centers in their respective states. These Consortium members included Alcorn State University, Tuskegee University, and University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. When evaluating the projects in their entirety, the results indicated that, in terms of price negotiation, each project negotiated independently. They received a competitive price based upon the farmers' production and the transaction costs. There were no minimum volume requirements in order to participate in the projects. For some projects, if the farmer received some form of benefit from their participation in the project, the farmer was required to devote a minimum number of acres to the project. During the project period, the demand exceeded the supply; therefore, farmers were encouraged to increase their production for the targeted crops.

This project provided historically disadvantaged farmers access to processing and marketing centers. The infrastructure for each of the projects varied significantly. Each individual project served as the aggregation center for its participating farmers. Alcorn State University had a fully functional vegetable processing and packing facility in Marks, MS. This facility allowed the farmers to produce commercial vegetables in order to diversify their farm operation and improve their marketing potential. The facility is used to educate the farmers on sanitation, and post-harvesting handling techniques. Moreover, the Marks facility is USDA certified. Farmers in Arkansas were processing and adding value to their products at two different processing facilities, namely, (1) Doolittle and Sons, and (2) the Agricultural Demonstration Outreach Center. The Agricultural Demonstration Outreach Center is owned by University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

Alabama farmers were in a very unique position. They had processing sites in four areas of the state. Two of the sites were temporary sites and located in Millbrook and Selma, AL. The third site was located in Malone, AL and shipped produced to the Walmart Distribution Center in Brundidge, AL. The fourth site was located at Al Hooks Produce Farm, and served as the main processing facility for the Small Farmers Cooperative and produce processed here was shipped to the Walmart Distribution Center in Opelika, AL. Plans are underway to obtain a new processing facility that will serve this targeted group. The proposed Black Belt Family Farm Fruit and Vegetable Marketing and Innovation Center (BBMIC) will be located in rural Dallas County, near Selma, AL. BBMIC will serve as the central packaging and shipping center for this project. This project will increase the number of farmers participating from less than 30 to 125 small farmers.

What were the Key Characteristics of Individual Projects?

Maintaining state brand identity was important and was not lost within the Consortium. Each state was able to maintain their own local identity for branding purposes. For the Southern Purple Hull Pea Initiative, each state sold their peas to Walmart Distribution Centers in their respective states. The peas were packaged in clam shells. Each clam shell received a label indicating that it was locally grown in that particular state. A summary of each project is given below:

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)

The UAPB project was primarily located in two areas: Southeast and Northeast Arkansas. Doolittle and Sons (D&S) completed the processing for farmers in Southeast Arkansas and the East Arkansas Enterprise Cooperative, Inc. worked with farmers in East Arkansas. East Arkansas Enterprise Cooperative, Inc. had an extensive history of providing marketing services for small, limited resource farmers. Approximately 22 producers grew purple hull peas on approximately 200 acres of land in 2012.

Alcorn State University (ASU)

ASU worked closely with the farmers in the North Delta Produce Growers Association. The North Delta Produce Growers Association consisted of 65 growers who worked closely with Alcorn State University in Mississippi. The North Delta growers utilized Alcorn's vegetable facility in Marks to wash, cool, grade and package their purple hull peas. Approximately 80 acres of peas were cultivated by the farmers. In 2012, Walmart picked up 27 pallets of peas,

which consist of 1,050 reusable plastic containers (rpcs) (shipping crates) and 10,500 clam shells.

Prairie View A & M University (PVAMU)

PVAMU worked with farmers in Smith, Houston and Waller counties. The focus of PVAMU's project focused on the production of cucumbers and strawberries. Emphasis was placed on working with assessing the needs of beginning farmers. Seasonal high tunnels were introduced as an alternative production option.

Tuskegee University (TU)

TU worked closely with farmers in the entire state of Alabama. During the project period, TU was instrumental in assisting a group of farmers established the Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperative (SFAC). SFAC was in the early stages of incorporation and consisted of individual farmers and cooperatives members in Alabama and Florida. It consisted of 25 farmers actively engaged in sourcing their locally grown produce to the Walmart Distribution Centers in Opelika, AL and Brundidge, AL. This group of farmers focused on watermelons, purple hull peas, and collard greens. The SFAC was the only project that successfully sourced all three crops to Walmart during the project period. As of February 2013, selected farmers had sold 2,434 cases of greens to Walmart.

Fort Valley State University (FVSU)

FVSU provided education and training to over 200 farmers during the project period at their annual Farmers Conference in 2012. FVSU worked closely with the Costal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative and the Synergy Cooperative to increase their incomes by marketing their produce collaboratively. The Costal Georgia Small Farmers Cooperative is located in Glennville, GA, about sixty miles southwest of Savannah, GA. It consists of 7 producers who grow southern leafy vegetables, yellow squash, purple hull peas, and Vidalia onions.

Activities and Accomplishments

A myriad of activities were completed during the project period. These activities included production planning, post harvesting, distribution, processing, aggregation, farm management training, business development, and food safety. Over 50 training sessions and meetings were held in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Texas during 2012 and 2013. At the annual Conference for Successful Marketing Opportunities for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers training was provided to over 150 participants in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Training sessions focused on: (1) opportunities and requirements for selling produce to Walmart; (2) knowing your true cost of production; (3) effectively marketing your produce for commercial markets; (4) current and new crop potential; (5) quality control from the seed to the store; (6) food safety; (7) Farm Service Agency and the noninsured crop disaster assistance program; (8) starting and sustaining a cooperative; (9) pricing, grading, irrigating, packing, and transporting produce for commercial markets; and (10) minimizing your risk on the farm.

Each of the universities also implemented an aggressive Good Agricultural Practices/Food Safety Certification Outreach Campaign. For example, Alabama reported that in 2013, 50 farmers received training in this area. Twenty (20) farmers received customized standard operating procedures, and half requested pre-audited consultations. Ten (10) farming

operations (nine farms, one processing facility) were certified for GAPs and the Global Markets Primary Production Assessments (Vaughan et al., 2014). Alcorn State University reported similar results. They indicated that 7 farmers were GAPs certified in 2013. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff trained 25 farmers on food safety and GAPs, and good harvesting and handling practices.

Learning across Value Chains

During the course of this project, three collaborative marketing conferences were held with Consortium participants. The initial meeting was held at the conclusion of the pilot project in December of 2011. The second and third conferences were held in December 2012 and 2013, respectively, at Tuskegee University, AL. Each conference was focused on exploring collaborative marketing opportunities farmers. Information was shared regarding individual projects successes, lessons learned, and future plans. Participants included university representatives, participating farmers, and representatives from retailers such as Walmart, Wholefoods, and Sodexo. Despite having different organizational structures and resources, the institutions formed a community of practice (COP) and readily exchanged ideas, insights, and suggestions for improvement. A better appreciation for the Consortium and the potential for the regional food system occurred at the project meetings. The outcomes that resulted included: (1) sharing information and transparency among the projects; (2) the emergence of trust and communication as the foundation of the partnership; and (3) sharing resources among the Consortium members. These three items contributed to the successes that the Consortium experienced. Key ideas and recommendations that emerged from the meetings included:

- Food safety certification is critical and without it the marketing and delivery of products cannot happen;
- Walmart is willing to work with the farmers to assure a successful program; and
- Consistent, e.g. weekly, deliveries of produce are required to facilitate sustainable markets.

Conclusion

The goal of SACH was to bridge the gap between the ability of historically disadvantaged farmers to grow produce and their ability to pack and market their produce in a manner that resulted in enhanced profits. Based upon the data collected, this project provided access to a more stable market for historically disadvantaged farmers than previously available. In addition, the Consortium provided farmers involved with the tools necessary to compete in a market that has traditionally been dominated by large farms. Initially, the participating farmers had limited knowledge of growing and selling their local produce for commercial markets. At the conclusion of this study, the farmers were able to: (1) negotiate price points, (2) develop a cold chain management system for their crops, (3) properly package and store their produce, and (4) cultivate and build a mutually beneficial relationship with the buyer, in this case Walmart. Furthermore, the benefits that were derived from the creation of the Consortium included: (1) providing supplemental income for the participating farmers, (2) expansion of the existing regional food system, and (3) promotion of good farm management practices. The strategic position of each of the players in this regional food system was greatly enhanced as a result of their participating in the Consortium.

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