

The **Certified Naturally Grown** of Stone Ridge, NY received \$44,564 to convene farmer organizers and farmer advisors in **Georgia and Tennessee**; cultivate robust local farmers' networks; and publish a how-to guide, online registry, and other resource materials that support local producer networks at the grassroots level.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Performance Report

Date: June 27, 2013

Recipient: Certified Naturally Grown (CNG)

Project Title: Fostering the development of strong local farmers networks that provide farmers with opportunities for cost-savings, collaboration, learning, resource sharing and joint marketing of locally grown food in Tennessee and Georgia.

Grant Number: NY-309-2010-G-1179 or 12-25-G-1179

Location: Brooklyn, NY (office). Project implemented in Georgia and Tennessee

Project Summary

In recent years there has been growing interest in buying local food and supporting the development of a sustainable food system. Only two percent of the country's population is part of a farm family, and the average age of land-owning farmers is 60. We need thousands of new farmers. And a new generation *is* turning to farming, often with a sense of calling, but little experience or know-how to help ensure they'll succeed. Book learning can only go so far, and the input from an experienced farmer can save hours of work, or an entire crop. Even farmers coming out of an agricultural training program have a much better chance of success if they're connected to others in the farming community who can be relied on for advice and support.

Many of these new farmers are growing diverse crops, on smaller parcels of land, and using sustainable practices. This approach to farming has a steep learning curve, the up front investments are considerable, and the odds of success can be daunting. Farming is inherently a very isolating occupation, which increases the vulnerability of a farming operation. The experience shared through local support networks can strengthen the farming community by providing valuable guidance for new farmers and opportunities for learning and collaboration among all participating farmers.

We use the term local network to mean a group of farmers who are intentionally working together in a particular region (which may span one county or as many as five counties) to improve their prospects for success. There are many different ways farmers can work together to form a network.

Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) has offered peer-review certification for direct-market farmers using natural methods since 2002. Our certification model, in which inspections are typically carried out by other nearby farmers, lends itself to – but doesn't guarantee – the development of mutually-supportive local networks. We've always encouraged the development of these local networks as a means to supporting the success of participating farmers. However until this project work was begun, we didn't have any resources to support network organizers, nor did we have many models or direct experiences to draw on in advancing our understanding of how CNG might best support local network development. The work conducted for this project has enabled us to directly support the development of several networks, while gathering insights,

experience and materials to better enable us to support the development of more networks that best serve direct-market farmers.

Project Approach

Our efforts focused on smaller-scale direct-market farmers and included certified organic, CNG, and non-certified farms.

We sought to identify the elements that make up successful networks and the challenges that are commonly faced, and then helped start four new “pilot” networks. The particular activities adopted by any given local network depended on several factors, including the challenges and opportunities facing that local group, the local culture, and the personalities, desires and talents of the farmers involved. In the last year, we continued to support the development of new networks, while supporting and encouraging more advanced development of the existing networks, going beyond monthly farm tours and helping them to incorporate more ambitious projects of interest to their members.

We chose to focus our efforts for this project on two states: Georgia and Tennessee. Georgia was chosen due to our pre-existing relationship with many farmers there. At the time of the project proposal, there were about 80 CNG farms in Georgia, where shopper demand for local food outstrips supply. (Today there are 131 CNG farms in Georgia). Many of these are beginning farmers responding to the demand for local, sustainably grown food, who would benefit enormously from the shared knowledge base a network allows. Tennessee was also chosen because of our relationship to a good number of farmers in that state. At the time of proposal there were 27 CNG farms in Tennessee, most of them clustered around the four different urban markets (Nashville, Fayetteville/Tullahoma, Knoxville, and Johnson City). At least two of these CNG members had initiated local network development in their respective areas prior to the start of this grant.

This work was carried out in two overlapping phases. In Phase I we hired network organizers to help develop four “pilot” local networks in Tennessee and Georgia and share their experiences with CNG and with one-another. The sharing among organizers was facilitated by regular monthly conference calls in which organizers would report to one another on their recent activities, including the challenges they were facing and the success they were finding. The calls were a valuable source of inspiration and support for the organizers, and a source of insight for CNG staff to inform the development of our resources for organizers.

In Phase II, we distilled the insights and lessons learned from the development of these pilot networks, and used this information to support the development of additional networks throughout the states where CNG members are already located and interested in developing their local networks. We provided this support through free webinars, in

person at regional gatherings, and through the materials we developed to support network organizers. These resources were posted online and promoted via email, Facebook, and in person at events.

While we had thought we might print and distribute hard copies of the resources we developed, we chose instead to take a more affordable and dynamic approach: to print and distribute eye-catching, bookmark-sized cards that would promote the value of networks and direct people to our online resources where they could find the specific information they sought, and the most up-to-date version of our Registry of Local Farmer Networks.

We developed the Registry to help connect farmers to networks near them and also serve as a source of ideas and inspiration to people interested in organizing their own farmers network. These resources are posted at <http://community.naturallygrown.org/networks>

Goals and Outcomes Achieved

As a result of this project, we have achieved the following

- i. Actively supported the creation of four robust “pilot” networks in Tennessee and Georgia, namely the Tennessee Growers Consortium, the Athens Growers, Georgia Growers, and the Georgia Mountain Farmers Network. We also supported the continued development of the Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers.
- ii. Developed resources materials for network organizers. We developed a concise how to guide with tip sheets for organizers, identified possible elements of local networks, as outlined in “Local Farmers Networks: An Overview of Common Activities”, profiled seven examples of different networks, and developed other resource materials to support beginning network organizers based on our findings, available online at <http://community.naturallygrown.org/networks>. Printed versions of most of these materials are included at the end of this report.
- iii. Supported the development of at least ten new networks using these materials and free webinars given by organizers of successful networks.
- iv. Developed an online Registry of Local Farmer Networks so farmers can easily find out if there’s already a network nearby and take inspiration from other examples. This online Registry includes a link to a survey so others can easily send us information about their networks and we can easily update the Registry as we learn of them. Our goal was to list at least 20 networks in the registry. By end of the project we had 85 networks listed, broken down by region as follows: Northeast – 19; Southeast – 21; Midwest 20; Northwest – 12; Southwest – 13. We will continue to add to the Registry as we learn of new farmers networks.
- v. Developed an online forum to facilitate communication among Georgia growers and recruited network members to participate. This online forum – a Facebook

page – is actively used by participants to share opportunities, ask advice, and promote network gatherings (www.facebook.com/groups/CNGFarmersofGeorgia/). In addition, the organizer of Georgia Mountain Growers developed a blog for that group's activities (<http://georgiamfn.blogspot.com/>), and the organizer for Tennessee Growers Consortium developed a Facebook page for that group (www.facebook.com/pages/Tennessee-Growers-Consortium/308749515841216?fref=ts). Recently TGC added a website and blog (<http://midtngrowers.com/>) to complement their Facebook page.

Overall we achieved our proposed goals and learned a lot about how CNG can play a useful role in supporting farmers networks. In fact, we have a greater appreciation for how CNG is particularly well-positioned to continue to play this role. We're connected with a lot of different farmers and their networks, and so can tap into their diverse experiences. We can quite easily set up webinars and other channels for sharing experiences. Farmers have been quite grateful for the opportunities we provided them to learn from other networks.

One of this project's questions was how to develop farmers' networks that sustain themselves. It was hoped that some models would emerge that demonstrated a group's ability to maintain a robust network on a purely volunteer basis. However, we found that farmers networks typically require someone with the right organizing and social skills to pull it all together, as well as some source of funding to compensate that organizer. Some purely grassroots volunteer-driven networks do exist, and they're valuable to their members, but the scope of their activities tends to be more limited. The few volunteer-driven networks we found with advanced activities are the exception to the rule. But there is reason for optimism. One of our more robust networks, Georgia Mountain Farmers Network, appears to have become self-sustaining, and offers a valuable model that other networks could follow. More details on that experience are provided below.

Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries of this project are the farmers who participate in local networks. The benefits take several forms: knowledge shared, which can result in greater profit or reduced loss resulting from mistakes; access to new markets via group liability insurance; a greater sense of social connection and ease in asking for support or advice; cost savings through group orders; and greater publicity for area farmers. Some of these benefits are more easily quantified than others. The network benefits for which we do have quantifiable results are outlined below.

Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers obtained liability insurance for its members in the fall of 2012, and that in turn allowed those members to access wholesale accounts such as Whole Foods. While most or all members of CSF are primarily direct-market farmers,

several of them were operating at a scale, and at a stage in their development when they were able to produce enough volume to supply a bigger account and thereby increase their income. In the first three months of 2013, the new CSF account with Whole Foods resulted in \$500 additional income for one farmer. It is anticipated that quite a few more farmers will take advantage of CSF having liability insurance and the account with Whole Foods in the coming years, resulting in thousands of dollars of additional income.

The Georgia Mountain Farmers Network (GMFN) was late to get started, but quick to take on an ambitious project – a regional farms tour designed to generate publicity for local farms, improve network identity and collaboration, and create a revenue source for the network. In addition to the farm tour, as a baseline activity, the GMFN consistently held monthly or bi-monthly farmer get-togethers (depending on the season) which took the form of a farm tour followed by a potluck and meeting. They typically allowed about one hour for each of the three activities.

The first Georgia Mountains Farm Tour was held in June 2012, just five months after the network’s first meeting (the organizer had spent a few months prior to that first meeting laying the groundwork for the network by interviewing participants about what they would want to achieve through forming a local network, and coming prepared with a list of possible network goals and activities). By all accounts this first Georgia Mountains Farm Tour was a success. The tour was modeled after a long-established annual farms tour, organized by the Carolina Farms Stewardship Association (CFSA). However, GMFN adapted and modified the event to better suit their networking goals. Farms would only host on one day of the two-day event, thereby allowing farmers to visit one another’s farms on the day they weren’t hosting.

The GMFN experience planning and hosting the Farm Tour was the basis for a webinar that was designed to share their experience and lessons learned. It was presented by the GMFN organizer several times during this project.

Drawing on the lessons learned from the first tour, and with the continued support of FMPP funds to plan it, a second Farm Tour was held in June 2013. It was an even bigger success. The results of both Tours are recorded below.

GMFN Farms Tour	June 2012	June 2013
# of Participants Touring	150	250
# of Host Farms	18	16
Gross Revenue – Sales	\$1,400	\$2,500
Sponsorship Revenue	None	\$800
Total Gross Revenue	\$1,400	\$3,300
Net Revenue	\$600	unknown

Revenue from the first Farm Tour helped underwrite the up front costs of the second tour. The revenue from the second tour – while not earned during this project period – is significant as an indication that the network can be self-sustaining. In this case, revenue generated from the seed money provided by FMPP will ensure the GMFN activities continue. Some of this year's funds will be used to hire an organizer for next year's tour.

In addition, and as an example of our network organizers taking inspiration from each other, some of the Farm Tour revenue be used to purchase liability insurance for the GMFN (after the network becomes a legal corporation) so its members can access new markets in a fashion similar to the Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers. GMFN has secured a contract with a local school district, and ten farmers in the GMFN are planning to participate in a farm-to-school program, for which they'll need liability insurance.

In addition to these quantifiable benefits, there are the undeniable but less easily quantified benefits to farmers that arise from sharing experiences and insights at farm tour/potluck gatherings that happened regularly at each of the five networks discussed here. During this project, the Georgia Growers Network held nine gatherings typically consisting of a farm tour followed by a potluck. Turnout was consistently good, with a core group of eight or ten attending each event, with a variety of several additional folks joining as well. In their second winter they organized a group order from Johnny's Seeds.

The Athens Area Network also organized nine gatherings, but these were a mix of farm tours and informational sessions. Several information sessions focused on developing new economic opportunities for local farms – eg selling to local restaurants, participating in wholesale opportunities facilitated by one of the larger local farms – while another focused on under-utilized resources for local farmers such as NRCS grants and assistance, Extension services, and a land-match service offered by the Athens Land Trust, a local nonprofit organization. Turnout to these events was high (typically more than 20 farmers) and afterwards several noted they wished they'd had the information when they were beginning farmers.

Lastly this FMPP grant has helped Certified Naturally Grown by allowing us to serve the farming community in a new way that is really appreciated. Our engaging in network development has generated goodwill toward the organization, and inspired us to continue supporting networking activities even after the grant funds have ended. Another way that the FMPP grant has benefited CNG is that it has enabled us to generate the enclosed educational materials that will help us more effectively support farmers networks. It's worth noting too that CNG membership in Georgia increased from 60 to 131 (more than 60%) in the three years since the proposal was written. We suspect this is due to several factors, but one of them surely is the goodwill and additional exposure for CNG generated by this project.

CNG, through our network organizers, was able to leverage outside resources as a result of this grant. First and foremost the farmers who hosted farm tours were generous with their time and didn't charge a fee for the use of their farm to host events. Also, the GMFN, following their first successful Farm Tour in 2012, received early enthusiasm from the Chamber of Commerce and other companies eager to sponsor this year's Farm Tour with financial contributions totaling \$800.

Lessons Learned

Going into this project we had assumed that the best organizers would be farmers. After all, they stand to benefit the most, and they tend to know the other farmers in their area. However, our experience suggests otherwise. There was very high turnover among our initial set of farmer-organizers. Given the characteristics of the organizers who did work out, our conclusion is that in general, farmers are actually not good candidates for this role. Their primary commitment is, and should be, running their farm, a highly demanding and unpredictable occupation. The responsibilities of a network organizer almost never demand immediate attention. This role is very part-time and the work required is rarely urgent, so what we found was that farmers would end up putting off network organizing when his or her farm responsibilities demanded immediate attention – which turned out to be nearly every day once the growing season started.

We found the best network organizers were people who were involved with and familiar with the local farming community, but not primarily responsible for running a farm themselves. Ideal candidates might work part-time on someone else's farm, have some past experience running a farm, or be a market manager and therefore familiar with a lot of farms, or they might work at a local non-profit organization that is involved with local farming issues. Of all the farmers we hired to be network organizers (there were nine) only one ended up being capable of filling this role (an exceptionally organized individual who also had a good amount of on-farm help).

Once we recognized that farmers weren't necessarily the best network organizers, we still were faced with the challenge of identifying capable non-farmer network organizers. This was the biggest challenge of this project – finding good network organizers who had time and the ability to play this role.

Similarly there were very few people who could serve as advisors to our network organizers. We did have a few experienced organizers join a couple calls in the early days, but their experience and interest in serving as an advisor didn't seem quite strong enough to merit a contract. We ended up using two of our more advanced network organizers as advisors in their particular arenas of expertise. They served their advisory role primarily through webinars, and also by being available for individual consultations by phone. Ultimately, we ended up not entirely spending the budget for Advisors. By

the same token, all the turnover among our organizers ultimately meant we were unable to spend all the funds allocated on these budget lines.

We also gained a deeper appreciation for the importance of seasonal timing when organizing anything requiring the participation of farmers. To make progress in network development in any given year, organizing must begin promptly as a growing season winds down and make the most of the slower months so that once the growing season picks up steam the schedule is in place, and the expectations for farmers to do any kind of planning or meeting is minimized.

Because it is more difficult to get farmers together during the growing season, some incentive beyond socializing is sometimes necessary. Our networks have found it useful to bring in a guest speaker to provide timely and valuable information on a) challenges farmers are likely to be facing or b) affordable or free resources available to them. For example, in summer of 2012, which followed an unusually warm winter that resulted in uncommonly difficult pest pressures, the Athens Area Network hosted a gathering in which a local extension agent gave a brief presentation about pests farmers were likely to see and how to deal with them using organic methods. A good deal of time was spent on questions and discussion afterwards, and participants felt it was a valuable use of their time during a busy part of the season. It was also a smart strategic move to hold informational gatherings at a time and place that coincides with the drop-off point of the online farmers market.

We found the most valuable way for CNG to offer peer support to developing networks was through webinar presentations. The webinars enabled us to have network organizers deliver information about other networks' experiences via well-organized slides and also allowed for informal discussion among participants as questions arose during the presentation. We made an effort to arrange for our webinar presentations to be delivered to groups of farms from a particular region, but even when delivered to a geographically diverse audience the discussion was valuable.

We held more than 13 conference calls with the network organizers we contracted with. On occasion some other farmers would join in and share their experiences. These calls were especially valuable in the beginning as a way for organizers to share ideas and address challenges.

In an end-of-project debriefing with Justin Ellis, organizer for the GMFN, he said "I really feel that the networks that will succeed in bringing change in their communities are the ones who are able to define who they are and what they're doing... But I'm also trying to remind myself that networks are valuable even if they are just to get-together." Indeed he found that farmers expressed that just "getting together" to exchange ideas is what they appreciate most about the network, especially in the early stages of network development.

Additional Information

Following this report are the resource materials developed during this project.

- Local Farmers Networks ~ Resource Pages
 - o Local Farmers Networks 101
 - Overview of Local Farmers Networks
 - Goals and Activities, Matrix of Possibilities
 - o Registry of Local Farmers Networks
 - Listing for each of the following regions: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Northwest, Southwest
 - o Interested in Starting a Network?, Tips
 - Why Get Involved in a Local Farmers Network?
 - Organizing a Network: What you Should Consider Before You Begin
 - Organizing a Successful First Gathering
 - Prompting Discussion
 - Financial Benefits of Local Farmers Networks
 - General Tips
 - Making the Most of a Potluck and Farm Tour
 - o Network Profiles: "Voices from the Field"
 - Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers, Tennessee
 - Athens Area Farmers Network, Georgia
 - Georgia Mountains Farmers Network, Georgia
 - Mid-Hudson Valley Growers Network, New York
 - Ad Hoc Network in Southwestern Wisconsin
 - The Center for Honeybee Research, North Carolina
 - An Expansive Network in Southwestern Colorado
- Don't Farm Alone bookmark
- CNG Network Organizers – Short Bios
- Photo: CNG Network Coordinator (Program Assistant) in action
- Webinar presentations
 - o You Too Can Organize A Farm Tour
 - o Multi-Farm Collaborations: Challenges and Rewards
 - o Liability Insurance for Farmers Cooperatives

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Local Farmers Networks



Local Farmers Network (\dɒ-kəl fār-mərs net-wərk), n. A group of farmers linked together to exchange information, collaborate, make joint purchases, and create a sense of community.

Save money.

Have fun.

Farm better.

Farming is a knowledge intensive occupation. It can also be quite isolating. Having a farmers network makes it easier to tap into the collective knowledge and resources that exist in farming communities.

Each network is unique – defined by the farmers who participate and the challenges they face. Some are loosely organized while others are more structured. Networks can include monthly potluck dinners and farm tours, bulk orders of supplies, joint marketing, multi-farm CSAs, and more.

We developed the resources below to help you get started or to connect you to an existing network and make it even better.

Local Farmers Networks 101

Not quite sure what we mean by "local farmers network"? Click here for an overview as well as examples of projects that a network might take on.

Registry of Local Farmer Networks

If you're looking to connect to a network, check out our Registry to find one near you. (Do you have a local network that's not listed? Tell us about it!)

Interested in starting a network?

No network near you? Start your own! Here are some resources to help you start off on the right foot, including a step-by-step guide.

Tips

Whether you're just starting out or are looking to strengthen your network, these tips will be useful to you.

Voices from the field

We interviewed people involved with all sorts of farmer networks to find out what they do and how it works. Read their stories.

Same page, in full context:



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Local Farmers Networks



Local Farmers Network is a national group of local food systems and agriculture advocates who work together to support local food systems and help a group of communities.

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Not quite sure what a local farmers network is? Click this for an overview as well as examples of ongoing local networks that you might take on.

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Voices from the Field

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Local Farmers Networks 101

Still not quite sure what we mean by 'local farmers network'? The resources below offer an overview of networks and descriptions of projects a network might take on.

Overview of Local Farmer Networks

An intro to some of the most common kinds of networks and activities. Please note that this is meant to be a useful starting point; you should always feel free to mix and match, adapt, and come up with new activities that best meet the needs of your network.

Goals and Activities Matrix

A quick reference to compare the kinds of activities that a network might take on, and their likely outcomes.

LOCAL FARMER NETWORKS: AN OVERVIEW OF COMMON ACTIVITIES

Before you begin, evaluate what you and your group of farmers want from a local network.

Organizing a network usually means a degree of extra work, but often the benefits from participating in a local network outweigh the costs. So what are the benefits you're looking to gain? To help you think about this question, take a look at this [Goals x Activities Matrix](#).

Below is a brief guide to some of the kinds of activities that farmer networks might take on. This list is not meant to be exhaustive or definitive, but a brief overview of some of the most common activities. Each activity has slightly different goals, benefits, and level organization required.

As you read, consider on your own and with fellow farmers:

- What are some of the obstacles (big and small) that face farmers in our area?
- Where is there room for cooperation that will lead to mutual benefit?

SOCIAL AND INFORMAL NETWORKS

Example: Calling neighboring farmers for advice; a group of farmers takes turns hosting potlucks

Many farmers have found it valuable to have a group of other farmers that they could call on for advice on topics ranging from weed and pest control to equipment to record keeping. This could be a very loose ad hoc network, based on one-on-one interactions, or it could be more organized, maybe with an online list-serve, or a directory or phone tree for everyone to keep in touch.

Hosting a farmer potluck can be a good way to get farmers together. Potlucks are an opportunity to have fun, relax, and enjoy the fruits of your labors (literally!). Additionally, it can turn into a time to swap information and tips that can help your farm run more smoothly.

Benefits

- You can learn from the successes (and mistakes) of others.
- This information is likely to save you time and money.
- It is informal, flexible, and dynamic. There is no expectation of a certain level of participation, and farmers can give or get as much out of it as they want.
- Farmers say they gain an important sense of community and mutual support
- It can be a source of fun and inspiration.
- Having a social network makes it easier to coordinate CNG inspections

Tips/Things to keep in mind

- Take the initiative, start talking! Communication is essential.
- Email is often the easiest way to keep in touch, but be sure to reach out and include the folks who rely more on the phone or face to face interactions.
- Don't be afraid to talk with farmers that have slightly or even quite different production practices than you. Many solutions and approaches to problem-solving can be transferable.

EDUCATIONAL NETWORKS

Examples: Farm tours, seminars, workshops, discussion groups, conferences

Organized educational activities can be good opportunities for growers to learn new information and concepts, and gain new skills. Activities could include on-farm tours, presentations from local experts on specific topics, round-table discussion groups, and/or conferences. Some models, such as the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT), focus specifically on providing additional training for farm apprentices or new farmers. Topics can range from soil fertility to equipment selection to administrative tools and business management.

Benefits

- You can gain knowledge that will save you time and money.
- You can learn from the mistakes of others: “Networking with other farmers is key to success, especially because beginning farmers can learn from the mistakes of others — although they should expect to make plenty of their own.” From Tom Larson, SARE profile.
- Educational events can be great networking opportunities; contacts made here can become the basis for new business relationships or other forms of cooperation.
- When experienced growers share their knowledge, it contributes to the viability of new farmers.
- All of this helps to strengthen the sustainable farming movement, promotes local food security, and contributes to a sense of community.

Things to Consider

- This will likely require some investment of time and/or money. Consider: Is there a way these costs can be shared? How much can I invest?
- Talk to the relevant state and local agencies and local agriculture groups in your area (Extension, NRCS, etc.). You maybe be able to get their help to organize, publicize, or fund presentations.
- If you're leading a farm tour, don't be afraid to talk about things that you've tried that have *not* gone well. This can be even more valuable learning opportunities than the successes. Furthermore, this could be a chance for you to get advice from others and do some group problem-solving.
- Get together in the slow-season to plan the events for the rest of the season.
- Many growers combine potlucks with formal educational activities, to make them informative as well as fun and sociable.
- Consider how to balance inclusivity and focus. How do you and other farmers want to focus your group: CNG and organic growers? Any farm in the area? Only vegetable operations or livestock too? Depending on your scale and style of production, there may be more to learn from/share with a conventional farm than an organic backyard gardener OR the other way round.
- Try to get both new and established growers involved. New farmers bring fresh energy and may have new ways of approaching problems, while established growers have time-tested experience to share.

JOINT-PURCHASING

Example: Three farms combine their orders for potting soil and seed potatoes.

Transportation costs for things like soil amendments, animal feed, cover crop seeds, and other supplies can be enormous. Sometimes they are as much or even more than the cost of the order itself. In addition, suppliers often offer a better price per unit for larger volume orders. So there can be a big financial benefit to placing multi-farm orders. Usually, one person must volunteer to collect everyone's orders, be the contact person for the supplier, and serve as the delivery and pick up site. Communication and timeliness is essential for it to run smoothly.

Benefits

- Often, you can get a better price per unit when you order in larger volumes.
- Delivery costs are reduced.
- Everyone benefits.

Things to Consider

- Keep in mind that the person coordinating the order is taking on some extra work. Make sure that person has the time and skills to do it well. Decide if some compensation (for example, bartering services or giving them a larger percentage of the cost savings) is appropriate.
- Participating farmers should take special care to be on time with their orders, if they're not they can hold up the process for everyone.
- Check and re-check your order before it is finalized, to avoid miscommunication and mistakes.

BARTERING SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT

Example: A farmer swaps extra greenhouse space in exchange for the use of the neighbor's potato digger

Having certain skills, infrastructure, and equipment can go a long way in improving farm efficiency and productivity. But it's hard and often cost-prohibitive for farmers to own all the infrastructure and tools they could use. Bartering services, tools, and equipment from neighbors is a way for farmers to have access to these time-savers, without having to buy everything up front. For example, a small grower might get a neighbor with a tractor to do the first plowing in spring in exchange for a share of the vegetables; or a pair of young farmers might volunteer to do some tomato trellising on their neighbors farm in exchange for the use of some equipment. The possibilities are limitless!

Benefits

- Bartering can be particularly beneficial for beginning or smaller farmers, who might not have the capital to invest in large equipment or infrastructure projects.
- Interactions can be dynamic and flexible, negotiated on an as needed basis or develop into a regular understanding.
- Barter agreements are often made easier by having an established social relationship already.

Things to Consider

- Make sure the trade is mutually-beneficial.
- Communication and having a clear understanding of expectations is very important.
- When lending equipment, discuss what the understanding is if an implement is damaged while it's being borrowed.

STARTING A NEW MARKET

Example: Starting the first winter market in your area

If demand exists, new farmers market can be an added source of revenue for multiple producers. This could be the first one in the region or perhaps at a new location or time during the week. As the demand for local foods has increased in the last several years, some farmers have found that winter markets, online markets, and local food storefronts have also been good channels to reach consumers. Sometimes farm enterprises that already have an on-farm store will stock products from other local farms in addition to their own.

Benefits

- Having several different products and vendors available in one place is a bigger draw for customers.
- It capitalizes on the heightened consumer awareness of locally and sustainably produced food.
- Provides new revenue. Some farmers have reported that sales at new winter markets were 2-5 times higher than from regular summer markets.

Things to Consider

- Before beginning, conduct market research try to ensure that there is sufficient consumer demand to support a new market
- Running a market requires significant amount of organization as well as time and money investments. Hiring market staff may be necessary.
- Make sure that you understand permitting process in your area, the fees that might be involved, and the insurance necessary. There are many resources available on this topic.

POOLING PRODUCTS

Example: A fruit farmer and a vegetable farmer team up to supply a single CSA; three small farms pool their heirloom tomatoes to offer a larger volume to the local health food store.

Two of the biggest hurdles for small farms that want to supply restaurants, institutions, or natural food stores are limited quantity or limited variety. Pooling products can be a way for small farms to gain access to these and other marketing channels. It takes some coordinating, but opening new markets can make it worthwhile.

Benefits

- Offering a greater variety of products may attract new customers and accounts.
- By offering a larger volume small farms can access larger accounts.
- It can save time and money by reducing the transaction costs for things like transportation, taking orders, and organizing the deliveries.
- From the perspective of a buyer for restaurants or health food stores, it's much more attractive to coordinate with one point person that can organize a larger volume order, instead of several smaller-volume producers.

Things to Consider

- Organizing this can take up a fair bit of time and running around. Make sure that whoever is coordinating the orders knows what they are getting into, has the time and the skills to do it effectively, and that they are compensated adequately.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH NETWORK

Example: Together five farmers choose 8 varieties of potatoes to grow and each keeps records on growing conditions, yield, and taste to find the best varieties.

It's clear that there is a need for agricultural research that is focused on small-scale sustainable farming, and that addresses local challenges. In response, some farmers have formed groups to coordinate and conduct randomized and replicated trials on topics ranging from crop varieties to soil amendments to cover crops to pasture management practices.

Benefits

- Farmers can gain insights that can save time and money, and allow them to achieve higher yields.
- Share the burden of conducting the research with other farmers: “If you don’t make mistakes, you’re not trying hard enough,” he says. “I just don’t like to make big, ugly, expensive ones. We take the tactic of trying very small-scale experiments and keeping track of the results.” Tom Larson, SARE profiles
- Get more accurate results by spreading the trials out over several farms.
- By sharing your results you can improve farm viability for everyone.
- This approach fills the need for rigorous research that is relevant to sustainable farming, and applicable to your local conditions.

Things to consider

- As a group, this requires a fair amount of careful design and planning, be sure that you and your group are prepared to take that on. It can be very useful to consult with academic researchers, especially during the experimental design phase.
- For the individuals conducting the trials, make sure everyone shares the same understanding of the procedures and what the expectations are.
- How will you share your findings with others, maybe through hosting field days, give a presentation at a conference, or simply talking with other farmers in your area?
- Would your project qualify for a SARE grant to support your efforts?

PUBLIC AWARENESS EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS

Example: Holding a public screening of Food Inc; hosting a locavore dinner

In teaching people why it’s important (and delicious!) to eat local, you can stimulate the market for all local food producers. There is a wide array of possible activities that will raise public awareness about local food and sustainable farming. These can include activities such as coordinating panel discussions, distributing ‘Buy Local’ bumper stickers and flyers, writing an op-ed for the local paper, publishing a directory of local producers, and organizing farm-centered festivals and open houses.

Benefits

- Educating consumers increases their commitment to local food and sustainable farming movements, and stimulates the market for all local producers.

Things to Consider

- It may be useful to partner with other institutions, such as the local library, public access TV station, consumer organizations, churches, and/or non-profits to organize and host events and publicize events.

ADVOCACY / LOBBYING

Example: A campaign for local farmland preservation

The local food movement has made farmers its heroes. Farmers can leverage this distinction to draw attention to issues that are important to them. They can play a unique role in motivating the public to push for policies that benefit small, sustainable farmers at the local, state, and national level. This could include a broad spectrum of issues like local farmland preservation or Food and Farm Bill reform.

Benefits

- By joining together, your voice becomes louder.
- You can be a force for change that will benefit your farm, the farms of others, and the whole community.

Things to Consider

- Farms that are nonprofits may not participate in direct advocacy; however, you may make your group aware of any important events or new developments.

JOINT ADVERTISING

Example: Maple producers in the Adirondack region all pay into a fund for billboards advertising Adirondack maple syrup.

Small producers may find it useful to band together and promote a specific products or products from a particular region. Publishing a directory of local producers or hosting a weekend of local farm “open houses” are other ways to promote local food together.

Benefits

- It gets the word out about local food and builds a brand based on the region. In this way it stimulates the market for everyone in the region.
- By pooling resources for advertising, you may be able to afford more effective advertising.

Things to Consider

- How will you structure and organize the necessary funds?
- Consider if it would be beneficial to incorporate as a non-profit business association.

JOINT STORAGE OR PROCESSING FACILITIES

Example: Multiple farms raise the capital to construct a shared facility for cold storage

While storage and processing facilities can add a tremendous amount of value for a farm business, even small infrastructure projects can be too expensive for some farms to take on themselves. These projects can include things like a shared CSA distribution center, cold storage and/or root cellar storage for winter marketing, a warehouse that can manage distribution to retail outlets, and a certified community kitchen to prepare foods.

Benefits

- Allows more people access to facilities that can make your farm business more profitable because the initial investment can be shared.

Things to consider

- This is an advanced form of network. Good relationships, a high level of trust, and very clear expectations are required to make this work.
- Depending on what project is chosen, it can be expensive. It will require serious amount of organization and may even require a dedicated staff

COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

Eg. Farmers coordinate the delivery of unsold farmers market produce to a local food pantry or shelter.

Access to fresh and sustainably grown food is still out of reach for many in the US. Some farmers donate the produce that is not sold at market to local food pantries. Others may coordinate with volunteer crews of gleaners and donate the produce that would otherwise go unharvested.

Benefits

- Helps to improve access to fresh healthy food in the local community
- It reflects well on whatever farms participate and may help cement customer support/loyalty.

Things to Consider

- When approaching institutions that are possible recipients of donations, try to estimate the volume and type of food that will be available (or if it's unpredictable, make sure they know that too!)
- Ask if there are certain kinds of produce that they can/can't use. (Better in your compost pile than in the garbage dump)
- Make sure they have the facilities to handle fresh produce.
- Work out a rough schedule – when can they accept donations? Are there times when they cannot?

COORDINATING THE PRODUCTION OF INPUTS LOCALLY

Example: Several farms save seed from different varieties and then share their stocks the next season.

Small sustainable farmers may not need to buy large volumes of expensive chemicals like conventional farmers do, but the operation of most farms still requires the purchase of inputs like compost, potting soil, seed, transplants, feed or replacement livestock. Often these inputs are transported long distances and come with a large fee for transportation. In the case of chicks and transplants, the long distances can result in higher mortality. By coordinating and supporting the production of these inputs locally, farmers may be able to save on transport fees, and will contribute to a greater degree of local food sovereignty.

Benefits

- Contributes to a greater degree of food sovereignty, keeps money in the local economy
- Farmers could save money on transportation

Things to Consider

- Could be a natural outgrowth of a social or educational network. It's useful to have a foundation of good relationships and trust that the latter bring before coordinating this.
- Start small with one type of input and a few farms, and then expand from there.

MATRIX OF POSSIBILITIES

Your local network will likely choose just one or a few activities to take on depending on the interests and needs of your local farming community. Below are a few suggestions, but feel free to come up with your own!

GOALS

ACTIVITIES

	Learn & share new info	Save time and/or money	Gain a sense of community	Support new farmers	Boost local food sales	Access new markets	Raise public awareness
Get advice from other farmers	●	●	●	○			
Have grower potlucks	○		●	○			
Hold grower discussion groups	●	○	●	○			
Create an online discussion list	●	●	●	○			
Farm tours / field days	●	○	●	●			
Conduct collaborative research	●	○	○				
Place a joint order for inputs		●	○	○			
Barter for labor or use of equipment	○	●	○	○			
Start a new market	○		○	○	●	●	
Pool products with other growers		○	○	○	●	●	
Share storage or processing facilities	○	●	○	○	●	●	
Compile a local farmer directory			○	○	●	●	●
Lead a 'Buy local' campaign			○		●		●
Organize a public farm-focused event			●	○	●		●
Campaign for better ag policy			○	●			●

Registry of Local Farmers Networks

URL: <http://community.naturallygrown.org/registry>

Home — Networks —

Registry of Local Farmers Networks

Welcome to the Registry!

Looking to join, build or strengthen a farmers network in your area? We created this registry to help farmers connect and learn from each other. Find your state in one of the regions below to see if there is a network listed near you. You can also browse other states to get inspiration about strengthening or starting your own.

If you know of a farmers network that isn't yet listed, we want to hear about it! Tell us all about it [here](#).



Northeast

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia



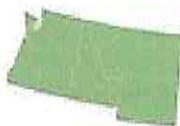
Southeast

Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Florida



Midwest

Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas



Northwest

Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Oregon



Southwest

Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, California

This is a sample of part of the registry listing for the Midwest region of the country.

(A complete listing can be found at: <http://community.naturallygrown.org/registry>)

Home — Networks — Registry of Local Networks —

Midwest

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Can't see your network listed? We want to hear about it! Tell us about your network [here](#).

Illinois

Upper Midwest C.R.A.F.T. (northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin)

CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) works to train our next generation of organic, biodynamic, and/or sustainable farmers.

CRAFT members gain access to hands-on training and learn skills that will help them advance from farming novices to starting and running their own farm. CRAFT offers on-farm training and business planning, field day workshops hosted by member farms and access to a wide variety of resources. All provided directly by the experienced farmers. You will be exposed to a wide diversity of farming practices and join a supportive network of farmers and farmers-in-training.

CRAFT welcomes trainees with all levels of experience, whether you've never farmed before, you have significant experience and need advanced training, or you're an established farmer seeking to transition to sustainable agriculture. CRAFT trainees include rural and urban residents, recent immigrants, and a high percentage of women. Many get involved through internships on CRAFT member farms. More than 70 sustainable farms in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin belong to CRAFT. Coordination is provided by Angelle Organics Learning Center. See website for more information:

www.learn-grow-connect.org/what/training/craft **Contact:** Rebecca Haldeeman, Program Assistant, at rebecca@learn-grow-connect.org or 815-889-8488.

Indiana

Northwest Growers

We are an informal group of farmers that want to provide locally grown farm products to our communities. **Contact:** Tom & Lisa Jonas, Sheffield Gardens, tommy57@comcast.net

Northwest Indiana Growers Network

We are a small network of 8 CNO growers who are looking to do more in our area. We are Chad Card (Hole in the Woods Farm), Brent Eccles (Green Acres Farm), and John Childs (Childs' Farm). We seek to do more collaborative work to save on marketing/shipping costs at markets in Chicago, roughly 80 miles away. **Contact:** Chad Card, chadholeinthewoodsfarm.com

Home – Networks –

Starting a Network

Want to help build your local network but not sure where to start? This package of materials will help you get well on your way.

1. Reflect on what you're ready to take on.

[Click here](#) for some important things to consider before you start.

2. Bring people together for the first event.

[Here](#) are some ideas to help make sure it's a success.

3. Come with some ideas of your own, and be ready to hear those of others.

[Click here](#) for examples of discussion prompts to get thoughts flowing.

4. Set some realistic goals.

Choose activities to take on in the short and long term. It's often helpful to start with small projects to build trust and momentum before moving on to larger goals. Here's a list of [examples of activities](#).

5. Divide up the responsibilities.

It's critical that everyone is on the same page about who is responsible for doing what, and if/how they will be compensated.

6. Make it happen!

It can take some effort to keep up the momentum, but it's worth it!

WHY GET INVOLVED IN A LOCAL FARMERS NETWORK?

With your long hard hours, and the dozens of priorities you juggle at once, you may ask “Why add another thing to my to-do list?!”

According to those who have made the efforts to connect with other nearby farmers, a variety of benefits more than justify the time commitment involved. The list below is to give you some idea of the rewards in store for those who choose to form a local farmers network.

Gaining new knowledge and skills

Farming is incredibly knowledge intensive, and farmers are an innovative bunch. Sharing innovations prevents each farmer from having to reinvent the wheel on their own. Exchanging knowledge and ideas can be rewarding on a personal level, and when that learning is put into practice it can mean better yields and more efficient systems.

- An Indiana farmer achieved much higher potato yields based on a tip from a local farmer on how to get a better handle on the Colorado potato beetles.
- Farmers in Wisconsin got together for a roundtable discussion to share their experience in labor management and crew leadership.
- Eastern Massachusetts farmers got together to hear from an extension agent and share their approaches to dealing with fungal diseases during the particularly wet year of 2009.

Improving the bottom line

New knowledge gained from a network can mean time and money saved. Pooling products and joint marketing can increase revenues and provide access to new markets. Bulk ordering on things like soil amendments or animal feed translates into major cost savings. Here are a few examples, but there are many other options!

- A New York farmer organized a bulk order for harvest bins that saved an average of \$720 for each of the 15 participating farmers.
- Five farmers in Colorado pool their products each week to supply several local restaurant accounts. Alone they could not supply this profitable market.
- Three farmers in New York teamed up to purchase and share a new potato-digger that they wouldn't have been able to afford individually. They estimate the investment will pay for itself in 2-3 years.

A sense of community

Even the most independent-minded farmers can enjoy the social aspect of participating in a network. It's meaningful to connect with a group of people engaged in similar work, and we've heard from lots of farmers that the biggest benefit they get from their network is plain old fun! Aside from the fun though, many farmers point to the value of having a network of folks you can count on for advice and assistance when you most need it.

- A Wisconsin farmer says “it feels good to see others doing similar work, you could feel out on the fringe if you didn't have a network.”
- A New York farmer adds that being able to borrow supplies or equipment from neighbors when equipment breaks or he runs out of something is literally priceless.

Organizing a Network: What you should consider before you begin

Organizing a local farmers' network can be very rewarding. It can also take some time and effort. This sheet is meant to highlight some of the things to consider before deciding to start organizing a network, and help you start thinking about when, how, and with whom to start it.

Making time

There's no hard and fast rule about how much time it takes to coordinate a network. It depends on the kinds of network activities you're seeking to take on, and how willing folks are to participate. For example,

- Arranging farm tours: if folks are reluctant to participate, it may take some coaxing and explaining; on the other hand if a few folks are ready to host a gathering, all you may have to do is set up the times and advertise. Taking time to make individual phone calls just prior to the event makes a huge difference in increasing turnout. It not only reminds people, it let's them know that it matters to someone if they come.
- Setting up an email list serve: This isn't difficult, but takes some up-front investment of time to gather email addresses and invite fellow farmers to subscribe to the list.
- Coordinating a bulk order: depending on how many farms are participating and how complicated the order is, placing the order and coordinating the pickup can take some significant time, but the cost savings can make it worthwhile.
- Multi-farm events or wholesale accounts: depending on the scale this can be many hours/week for long periods of time or perhaps even a full-time commitment.

Many organizers have found that the largest investment of time and energy comes at the beginning to get the ball rolling and decreases as time goes on.

Sharing the responsibility

One way to make the time commitment more manageable is by finding ways to share the responsibility with others. In fact, in some farmer networks a work component is a requirement to be a member. This works best when there are discrete tasks and clear expectations. For example, one person maintains the email list, another person is in charge of sending out reminders for events, several different people coordinate separate bulk orders, etc.

Compensation

If you're committing dozens of hours a week to network activities, consider finding a way to build in compensation for yourself that everyone can agree on. For example, if you're organizing the bulk order, maybe you get a slightly bigger discount. If you're arranging multi-farm sales to restaurants, perhaps you get a percentage of the sales. Making sure that the organizer is fairly compensated for their time when possible is important to making the arrangement sustainable over the long term.

Timing

It's often best to get started in the off-season when everyone has a little more time. That way you can build momentum before the peak of the season.

Welcome New Members

If you're not the social type, but you want to make this happen, consider partnering with someone who enjoys talking with others so they can help with reminder calls and creating some social glue. For example, it's valuable to have at least one or two people at each gathering who will greet people as they arrive and make them feel welcome.

ORGANIZING A SUCCESSFUL FIRST GATHERING

The main goal of any first gathering is primarily to get everybody in the same room and talking to each other. What it looks like exactly will vary depending on the lay of the land in your community, but the focus should be to provide a forum for farmers to talk about what they might want from a network. Here are a few suggestions—from logistics to discussion topics—to help make your first event successful. Feel free to adapt these ideas to what you think will be the most effective for your particular situation.

Gauge interest

- ◆ Talk to farmers or beekeepers in your area about starting a local network. This will be useful to feel out their interests and concerns, and tailor the first event to address these.
- ◆ Talk with the people you know and reach out to new folks as well.

Plan the event

- ◆ **What:** Could include a discussion, potluck, and/or farm tour. Be sure to make time for mingling.
- ◆ **When:** It will be impossible to choose a time that will work for everyone, but there are ways to maximize the likelihood that people will be able to make it by considering....
 - ◇ Time of year: early and late in the season as well as the off-season usually work the best.
 - ◇ Day of the week: try to avoid farmers market or CSA pick up days.
 - ◇ Time of day: late afternoon and evening often work well.
- ◆ **Where:** Choose a spot that is centrally-located and easy for most people to get to. It could be at a community center or library or better yet at a farm. An on-farm location may draw more participants if it's combined with a farm tour. (If you go that route, see [Making the Most of a Potluck and Farm Tour](#) for tips specific to those events.)

Get the word out

- ◆ Advertise in as many different ways as possible, including email, mail, flyers, facebook, phone, in person.
- ◆ Make it personal: The more personal the invite (eg. phone, in person) the better the turn out.
- ◆ Send multiple reminders, including one a day or two before the gathering.
- ◆ Include clear directions so folks know how to get there, where to park, and where to meet.

Logistics

- ◆ If your gathering will be outside, consider whether the host has indoor space in case of inclement weather or set a back-up date.
- ◆ Consider: are there enough tables? Chairs? Hay bales? Or are folks okay sitting on the ground?

At the meeting

- ◆ Ask one or two people to act as “greeters” to make people feel welcome as they arrive.
- ◆ Start by having each person introduce themselves to the group.
- ◆ Pass around a sign-in sheet to collect names, email addresses, phone numbers, etc.
- ◆ Be sure to include social time. In areas where there has been little or no networking, face-to-face social time is critical to building relationships and trust.

- ◇ The social time could be free-form mingling, structured mixing, discussion groups, or some sort of combination. Consider what people would be most comfortable with or enjoy the most.
- ◆ Make time to brainstorm together about a what people want from a network, what activities or projects a network could take on, and what people's concerns are. It's often useful to come with some of your own ideas to get the ball rolling, but the emphasis stay on getting everyone's ideas on the table.
 - ◇ See the Discussion Prompts for examples of questions that might be helpful.
 - ◇ If there is a large number of people, try breaking into small groups for some of the time. This might help folks who are on the shy side share their ideas.
 - ◇ If it turns out to be a big list, identify priorities by a show of hands or asking people to rank their top three. Also, consider dividing the list into short and long term goals.
- ◆ Based on comments and interest from your fellow farmers, identify some next steps and who can help.
- ◆ Take notes! (Or ask someone to take notes for you)
- ◆ Make sure everyone is on the same page as to what the next steps are, what the goals and likely outcomes are, and who is responsible for what. (Make sure that you take on only what you are able to manage successfully.)

Afterward

- ◆ Stay in touch with the group: collect comments and feedback, share the notes from the gathering.
- ◆ Follow up with folks who are in charge of taking the next steps.
- ◆ Start planning the next one!



PROMPTING DISCUSSION



As one large group or multiple smaller groups, spend some time exploring people's thoughts about forming a local network. Below are some examples of questions that might help prompt discussion. As a facilitator, don't be afraid to add your thoughts to, but make sure that you give everyone a chance to think and share. It may be helpful to write down people's responses on a chalkboard or large piece of paper for everyone to see (and to have a record of later). Feel free to pick and choose from these examples, or come up with your own!

- What are the biggest challenges that you face in your operation?
- What are ways that farmers in our area can collaborate to our mutual benefit?
- What are some activities/projects you'd like to see a network take on in the next year? In the next five?
- What are some concerns you might have about forming a network? What might make it difficult for you to participate in a network?
- What do you want to get out of a network personally? (eg. sense of community, learning, professional networking, business partnerships.....)
- What do we want/need in order to have a more resilient and profitable farming community?

Financial Benefits of Local Farmers Networks

There are many ways that farmers can work together to realize cost savings for everyone involved. Here are a few examples that we've collected from farmers with experience.

Bulk Orders

By combining orders of inputs and supplies, farms can often save on shipping and get a better per unit cost.

Eg. Quincy Farm in NY needed some new harvest bins (also called totes or lugs). Instead of placing an individual order for 120 bins they organized a bulk order with 15 farms for 1,200 harvest bins. By combining the orders, it reduced the price per bin by 35%. That turned out to be an average of \$512 in savings for each farm!

	<u>Cost per Bin</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
Individual rate	\$18.40	\$22,080
Bulk rate	\$12.00	\$14,400
Cost Savings	\$6.40	\$7,680

The farmer organizing the order estimates he spent ~10 hours contacting suppliers, collecting orders, and organizing the delivered bins for pick up. It was his first time organizing a bulk order, and he feels confident that he'll be able to streamline the process the next time. He may also claim a slightly larger percentage of the discount next year.

Sharing Equipment

Splitting the cost of new equipment can lessen the burden of the upfront investment for each farm, allowing small farms to purchase tools to improve efficiency and save time.

Eg. Three farms in NY's Hudson Valley teamed up to buy a Potato Harvester together. Doing so saved each farm over \$3,000 dollars on the initial investment, and allowed them to purchase a higher quality model than any of the farmers could've afforded on their own.

Emergency Supplies

Sometimes a piece of equipment breaks or it turns out you have less of a supply than you thought, and the things that need doing won't wait. If you have an established network to rely on, it's likely that another farmer has some extra supplies that you can use in the moment, and then replace at a later time. It's hard to put a dollar value on getting what you need, when you need it!

Eg. During one season, Huguenot Street Farm (NY) ran out of row cover for their brassica crops. They ordered more rolls, but they took 7 days to arrive, by which time they would've lost their crop to ferocious flea beetles. Luckily, the farmers were able to get several rolls from others in their network in the meantime, and save the crop.

Getting Past Minimum Order Requirements

Several inputs, like some organic pesticides or soil amendments, are only available in amounts that are several times greater than many small farms can use. Splitting an order among many producers gives each access to supplies that wouldn't have been unavailable otherwise.

LOCAL FARMER NETWORKS: GENERAL TIPS

- The number one biggest challenge to developing a local network is TIME. So, consider:
 - lay the foundation for the network in the winter when folks are likely to have the time to get involved
 - find ways to share the responsibilities, and/or adequately compensate and thank network organizers
 - get help from non-farmer organizations that support local farmers
- Start small. Don't take on more than you can handle at first, and then grow from there.
- Communication is essential, keep the lines open! Consider what ways are best for the farmers in your area to keep in touch.
- Engage your neighbors, even if they farm in a different way
- If your network activity requires funds, consider different ways to raise funds (membership dues, sponsorship/partnerships with local business, extension office, etc)
- Find ways to balance inclusiveness with focused membership -everyone has something to share, but you want to get the most out of your time as possible.
- Farmers may find it most useful to form networks based on shared characteristics, for example having similar practices or using similar marketing strategies such as CSA or farmers markets.
- Discuss competition and develop an understanding. One farmer said about his local network 'we all understand that it's an open market, but we try not to step on other people's toes too much, we don't purposefully undercut each other's prices or directly target other people's customers.'
- Think carefully about what a) you, b) other farmers, and c) consumers need/want.
- Be open: there is a broad spectrum of possible activities you can take on
- Be patient: organizing a network will take some time and resources
- Think carefully about the leadership and succession. If the network is largely sustained by one or a few people, what happens if they must stop for some reason? For the network to be sustainable, make sure you share the work or have a plan for the next person/people to take on more responsibility.
- Involve well-established farmers as well as newer ones. The established farmers have valuable knowledge and experience to share, and newer ones can bring energy and fresh perspectives.
- Find ways to make your network fun and enjoyable, as well as efficient.

MAKING THE MOST OF A POTLUCK AND FARM TOUR

Planning

- Ask a well-known farmer, someone who will be a “draw” to host the farm tour.
- Choose a date and time that is likely to fit with farmers’ schedules. The best day of the week may depend on the market or CSA pick-up days in your area.
- Advertise widely using as many different ways as possible! That means email, mail, flyers, phone, in person.
- Usually, the more personal the invite, the better the turn out.
- Ask people to RSVP or sign up to bring a dish. If people commit in some way, they are more likely to come.



Logistics

- Consider whether the host has enough indoor space for everyone in case the weather is a problem. As an alternative, set a rain date as a back-up.
- Ask people to bring their own plates, silverware, and cup. It’s important to make it a good experience for the host-farmer and minimizing the cleanup that they have to do goes a long way.
- Consider the seating options: Are there tables and chairs? Hay bales? Or are folks okay sitting on the ground?



Content

- Have each farmer introduce themselves to the group in case some farmers don’t know each other.
- Consider having a theme for the farm tour: what is unique or special about the host farm?
- Remind the host not to be afraid of pointing out the biggest challenges on the farm: you can learn as much or more from what has gone poorly as you can from what’s gone well.
- The social time could be free-form mingling, structured mixing, discussion groups, or a combination. What do you think people would be most comfortable with? What would they enjoy the most?

Afterward

- Stay in touch with the group: collect comments and feedback, and ask for volunteers to host the next gathering.
- Based on comments and interest from growers, identify the future hosts and potential topics.
- Start planning the next one!



Tipsheets

URL: <http://community.naturallygrown.org/tipsheets>

Home – Networks –

Tipsheets

Interested in starting or improving your local network? Check out these tip sheets for helpful ideas.

- Why Get Involved in a Network
- Things to Consider Before You Begin Organizing
- Financial Benefits
- General Tips
- Potluck & Farm Tour Tips

Voices from the Field

URL: http://community.naturallygrown.org/network_profiles

Voices from the Field

Check out these snapshots of local farmer networks. They run the gamut in terms of their focus, their activities, and the challenges they face. Collect tips and get inspiration!

- Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers, Tennessee
- Athens Area Farmers Network, Georgia
- Georgia Mountains Farmers Network, Georgia
- Mid-Hudons Valley Growers Network, New York
- Ad Hoc Network in Southwestern Wisconsin
- The Center for Honeybee Research, North Carolina
- An Expansive Network in Southwestern Colorado

(The 7 networks, listed in green text above, are 'clickable' live links)

The following pages include 'Voices From The Field' intended as snapshots of local farmers networks. These are available on the CNG Community Site at the following URLs:

Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers, Tennessee

http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/Chattanooga_Sustainable_Farmers_1.pdf

Athens Area Farmers Network, Georgia

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/AthensAreaFarmersNetwork.pdf>

Georgia Mountains Farmers Network, Georgia

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/GeorgiaMtnFarmersNetwork.pdf>

Mid-Hudson Valley Growers Network, New York

http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/MHVG_N-Final.pdf

Ad Hoc Network in Southwestern Wisconsin

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/AdHocNetwork.pdf>

The Center for Honeybee Research, North Carolina

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/CenterForHoneybeeResearch.pdf>

An Expansive Network in Southwestern Colorado

http://www.naturallygrown.org/documents/M.Vozar - Expansive_Network.pdf

CHATTANOOGA SUSTAINABLE FARMERS

Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers (CSF) describes itself as “a non-profit cooperative of farmers who are working to increase the supply of fresh, locally produced foods.” CSF was formed in 2009 by a group of farmers in the Chattanooga-area who won a grant from the Benwood Foundation’s Food System Ideas Competition. The grant allowed the group to hire Butch Tolley as a Project Coordinator, and we were lucky enough to hear what Butch had to say about the experience.

GETTING STARTED & SETTING GOALS

Butch’s first task as Coordinator was to learn more about the specifics of what the farmers in the area wanted and needed from a network. He created some web-surveys using Survey-Monkey and while this proved to be somewhat useful, he also took the time to go to members’ farmers and sit down for a chat. Butch says

It’s a huge investment of time and energy, but it pays off. You get different answers when you’re at the dinner table or sitting on the front porch. Plus, you see things you wouldn’t see otherwise. Maybe you notice a piece of old equipment that’s not being used, but that someone else mentioned that they need, and you can start making those connections.

The next step is figuring out how to balance what is wanted and need with what can be accomplished considering the resources at hand. Butch emphasized that it’s important to set reasonable goals, and to start with something small and achievable. Once the network builds some momentum, it can take on larger and more complex projects.

The Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers had to play this balancing act from the outset. One of the main objectives starting off was to find local options for chicken processing. Currently, the nearest processing facility is in Kentucky, which means adding about 8 hours of driving time to a farmer’s already long day. Clearly this is a very important challenge to address. Equally clear, is the fact that finding a solution will be a long process and take collaboration with a number of other institutions. While working on this in the background, the group has in the meantime tackled projects that can be accomplished more quickly and build momentum. These include bulk orders, educational meetings, and perhaps most interesting, setting up product liability insurance for members.



Chicken at Butch Tolley’s Clover Wreath Farm

NETWORK ACTIVITIES

Many retailers and institutions require producers to carry product liability insurance to protect against the risk



Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers farm tour and discussion

of harm to customers from the product. For many farmers this puts some of those larger markets further out of reach, so setting up a group policy became one of CSF’s objectives.

According to Butch, the most difficult part was simply finding a company that was willing to work with CSF. As luck would have it, a CSF member mentioned that their policy already included product liability insurance, so Butch contacted the policy underwriter, Cotton State. Several farmers were interested in marketing to Whole Foods in particular, so Butch also contacted the managers there about the level of coverage that they require. It turns out they require \$1 million coverage for most produce and \$5 million for anything ready to eat (such as bag salads or cut spinach).

Once Butch had a company to work with and knew the requirements, it took about a month to hammer out all the details with the underwriter and to process the paperwork with Whole Foods. Now, CSF members are covered by the policy for any account set up by CSF and the cost for coverage of the network and each of the farmers is \$350 per year. Current-

ly, CSF has 28 members, and 3-4 are actively selling their produce to Whole Foods using this account.

The educational meetings, held monthly on topics ranging from bee-keeping to butchering, have been a smashing success. They are designed with farmers in mind, but many are also open to the public for a small fee for non-members. The butchering workshop was particularly well-received. It gave farmers a better sense of what to ask for to get the highest cutting yield, and what cuts they need depending on their markets.



CSF organized a Fundamentals of Butchery workshop was led by Gregg Rentfrow, Assistant Extension Professor of Meat Science at the University of Kentucky

Another particularly useful meeting focused on crop planning. By design, they held the meeting in the winter, right when farmers were thinking about their seed orders. Each participant received an electronic copy of the spreadsheet developed by Crabtree Farms set up so you could plug in the number of plants you wanted to end up with and it would tell you how many seeds to order. Butch underscored how valuable a resource this was. "That spreadsheet is the result of an incredible amount of experience, record keeping, and hard work to set those up – it could take years to do on your own or cost hundreds of dollars to buy the commercially available one."

Several members of the CSF joined together on a bulk order of supplies from Seven Springs. The savings from the bulk price was roughly \$1.00-0.50 per unit, not counting savings on shipping. But, as Butch pointed out, the savings are difficult to measure – without ordering in bulk, it would've been so costly it would've been prohibitively expensive for most items. "It's not so much a question of savings, so much as being able to get it or not." While the bulk order provided savings and access to new products, it did not run as smoothly as it could have. For example, there was a miscommunication with the company about the forks to unload the delivery. It was not until last minute that the CSF farms discovered that there would be a fee of several hundred dollars for the use of the forks, so they had to scramble to find some last minute. Overall, the bulk order was a good learning experience this year.

In addition to all of these activities, CSF has a number of other ambitious initiatives on the horizon, including a directory of open land available for grazing, a directory of non-GMO grain producers, health insurance for farmers, and, of course, the chicken processing challenge.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

Because the Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers is somewhat unique when it comes to funding, we'll make a quick note here on the finances. As mentioned above, the initial investment for the group came from a grant from the local Benwood Foundation. The grant gave the network \$75,000

over three years, which covered Butch's salary and other expenses. At the time of this writing in summer of 2012 the term of the grant is coming to a close, so the group is transitioning to new strategies both to generate revenue as well as share the leadership responsibilities more broadly.

To raise revenue, CSF has annual dues of \$100, though the membership drives to encourage sign up offered discounted rates. Additionally, the educational meetings, while free to members are also open to the public for a fee and generate some funds. They are also planning a summer fundraising event. Recently, Butch has been reducing his hours, while the Board and some members have become more active in governing the organization.

Advice

When asked if he had any words of wisdom for others seeking to organize their own local farmers network, Butch was emphatic:

Persistence! There are times when you're out there beating your head against the wall, no one is responding to your emails, and it feels like you're not making any progress. But then you happen to say the right thing to the right person, and you draw them in, and they draw in others. It's about networking and connecting with the right people who will influence others. ■

For more information see [www.chattanoogasustainablefarmers.org](http://www.chattanooga sustainablefarmers.org)

ATHENS AREA FARMERS NETWORK

Athens has a vibrant local food and farming scene. The community boasts weekly farmers markets, a growing farm to school program, top-notch restaurants specializing in local food, and a strong community of farmers. Notwithstanding, bringing a bunch of busy farmers together for professional networking is always a challenge. Some attempts to host networking events had been made in the past, but they were for the most part poorly attended.

In late November 2011, Kate Munden-Dixon was hired part-time by Certified Naturally Grown to facilitate a network in the Athens area. The position as network organizer fit well with her other positions as the Program Director of the nonprofit P.L.A.C.E. (Promoting Local Agriculture and Cultural Experiences) and as the SARE Program Assistant at the University of Georgia .

Setting a direction

Kate took advantage of the slower winter months to host the first network gathering at her house in early December 2011. The kickoff event was designed to get folks in the same room, to socialize and network over a potluck dinner, and to outline out what they wanted from a farmers network.

From that initial meeting emerged the general consensus that the farmers were most interested in topic-driven educational gatherings. The farmers felt that the meetings would be more useful if they had a focused theme and that they would be more motivated to attend than if the gatherings were more general farm tours.

Meetings

The first meeting was hosted by Native Sun Farm and

had a double focus on (1) high tunnel construction and (2) using crop mobs to complete large projects. If you've never heard of crop mob, you're not alone – none of the farmers in the network had either. Crop mobs are organized events where a farmer hosts a mixed group of volunteers, ranging from experienced farmers and gardeners to green-as-can-be wannabe farmers, who all pitch in to complete a work project. In this case, the project was erecting a high tunnel and planting potatoes. The farmers were impressed by the amount of work that the crop mob accomplished; the 100-ft high tunnel was completed in an hour and a half flat!

Kate got a lot of requests for a meeting focused on pests so for the next meeting she invited extension agent Amanda Tedrow to discuss Integrated Pest Management. Kate chose to hold the meeting on a Thursday afternoon, after the drop-off for the Athens Locally Grown Market. Scheduling the meetings then capitalizes on the fact that farmers are already off farm and at the same place at the same time. Amanda gave a brief presentation to start off and then opened it up to questions and a lively discussion. Kate said of the meeting "We had a nice turn out, including four new people who I'd never met before so it was nice to see them. People seemed to enjoy and appreciate it, and had a ton of questions about what's going-on on their farm."

Looking ahead

The network is fairly young and is still taking shape. The next two meetings may help determine the direction for the future.

The first is another Thursday afternoon meeting that



Native Sun Farm hosted the first meeting of the Athens Area Farmers Network as well as a crop mob event to build a high tunnel. (Photo courtesy of Grandma Brock's Country Farm)



Crop mob and Athens Area Farmers Network in front of newly constructed high tunnel at Native Sun Farm
(Photo courtesy of Grandma Brock's Country Farm)

aims to bring together farmers who have excess produce to discuss the possibility of forming a food hub. As if a food hub discussion weren't enough of a draw, the meeting will also feature food from the Veggie Patch prepared by a local chef.

The impetus for the discussion came from the farm manager at the Veggie Patch, who approached Kate for help to organize a preliminary discussion. The Veggie Patch, one of the biggest Certified Naturally Grown farms in the area, already has some of the necessary infrastructure to manage the storage and distribution, including a large cooling center and multiple refrigerated trucks. As a first step the Veggie Patch is interested in purchasing excess produce after farmers markets. Later on, they would potentially seek to work with farmers to include wholesale markets in their crop plans before the season begins.

By consolidating produce from multiple producers, the Veggie Patch could land larger accounts for restaurants and regional grocery markets, and smaller farms could access those markets. There are many challenges to developing a food hub as well. It requires a tremendous amount of communication and planning, and strong and trusting relationships. Furthermore, participating farmers would likely need to sort out product liability insurance – a headache on its own.

The following meeting will focus on marketing to restaurants. At earlier meetings, many farmers had mentioned their frustration over how difficult they found it to sell excess produce to local restaurants. Similarly, many chefs who want to purchase local food found parts of the process challenging. To start off the meeting, Kate has invited some chefs who purchase local food to give a brief presentation on what they look for in terms of volume, quality, price, and time of the week they are able to receive deliveries. Kate explains that "it's meant to be an

opportunity for open discussion between the chefs and farmers so they both get a better idea of the needs and limitations that the other is facing."

Lessons learned (so far)

When asked about what she's learned that might be useful for someone interested in getting their own network started, Kate had a few thoughts.

First, Kate says it takes more than a couple of emails to get people to attend. "I've gotten much better turn out when I've called people on the phone. Most of the time I don't even get a hold of anybody and I'm just leaving voicemails. But even leaving a message strengthens the invitation. It's also nice to include drinks and/or food as part of the event. It gives people a little extra incentive to come out."

Kate also emphasizes the value of in-person interactions. Kate says "I try to make myself available, I go to the farmers markets and I'll bump into people. We'll talk about the next meeting or we'll discuss the last one we had. I think the fact that I'm around and visible make people feel more connected, and more likely to participate."

But overall, the most important thing that she's learned is that "it's essential to ask the farmers what they want. It would've been a mistake to schedule all farm tours for this group, that's not what they wanted. They wanted something more specific and focused. Also, farming is so seasonal, what farmers want from a network may be different depending on the time of year, so it's important to not only ask them what they want at the beginning, but to *keep* asking them what they want." ■

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS FARMERS NETWORK

Bringing people together to form any kind of network is always a challenge, and the farming community in north-east Georgia is no exception. According to one local farmer “the biggest problem I see that small farmers have in our area is we don’t talk with each other and we feel real isolated,” signaling both the challenge and opportunity in organizing a local farmer network.

Using federal grant funds, Certified Naturally Grown hired Justin Ellis as a network organizer in fall of 2011 and since then he has been bringing farmers together to lay the groundwork for the Georgia Mountains Farmers Network (GMFN). At the time of this writing the GMFN is still a young network (only 6 months old), but it is clear that there is already much to learn from a snapshot of the network and its success and challenges so far.

GETTING STARTED

Justin wears a few different hats in his community: he is Executive Director of the Soque River Watershed Association, a PhD candidate in Innovations in Sustainable Agriculture, and he and his wife grow produce to sell at a farmers market as well. In a community where many of the farmers didn’t know each other, the contacts and connections Justin has made in each of these roles, put him in an excellent position to reach out to farmers about forming a network.

Justin began by calling each farmer individually to ask them first whether they wanted a network, and second what they wanted from a network. Justin felt the process was incredibly valuable:

I took careful notes, and tried to write down exactly what they said. From that, I really knew why they wanted a network...The process helped to outline the needs of the community...and it helped me see how everything was connected.

The process of calling each farmer individually and getting their feedback is also likely to increase the connection each farmer feels to the network, and increases the likelihood of participating. Justin added,

In my communications with farmers, I tried to echo what they had said back to them...It sends the message that I’m paying attention. From experience in other work, I know that people won’t care what you’re talking about if you don’t both listen and let them know that you are listening.

MEETINGS

So far the GMFN has hosted two meetings. The kick off event, held in January, was well attended; 22 out of the roughly 30 or so serious growers in the area participated.



The second GMFN farm tour at Woodland Gardens (Winterville, GA) in March 2012. Tour focused on cropping systems in high tunnels and greenhouses.

It began with a tour of Burton Mountain Farms focused on aquaponic greenhouses. A potluck dinner followed, which turned out to not only be delicious but an essential time for mingling and networking as well.

Before closing, the group brainstormed a list of 15 goals that the network might choose to focus on. These included a whole range of ideas such as bulk ordering, cooperative marketing, finding ways to facilitate farmer

communication, organizing crop mobs, and sharing equipment. Once the list was complete, they used the sticky dot voting method (each farmer received 3 stickers which they could place next to the item(s) they felt were most important) to help identify priorities.

The second meeting was held in March at Woodland Gardens, a farm known for their high tunnel and greenhouse production. This was an unusual event as it was out of the area, but farmers were interested in visiting this particular farm because several growers had recently put up greenhouses. Despite the 1.5 hour drive, attendance was impressive, with 18 farmers making the trip.

The GMFN's April meeting was hosted by Chuck Taylor at Taylor Creek Farm in Toccoa, Georgia. The tour included a CNG inspection, with participants going through the inspection worksheets which provided a guide for comprehensively reviewing the farm's practices. The group of 24 growers also got to see the farm's bed shaper in action as well as Chuck's detailed planting and harvesting schedule.

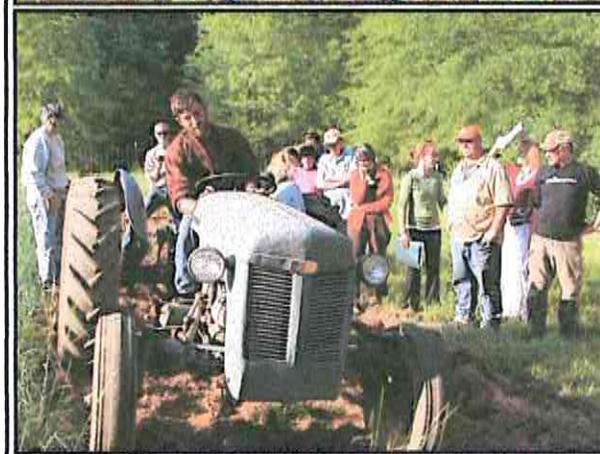
BULK ORDERS

Justin organized a combined order of farm supplies from Seven Springs. The basic premise of joint ordering is that by combining many smaller orders into one, small farmers can access bulk discount rates and/or the reduced shipping cost per unit. The order included all sorts of things such as cover crop seed, humic acid, row cover, and natural fertilizer. In this case, the 10 participating farmers ordered a total of 63 units, mostly 50-lb bags of fertilizer or potting mix. To ship these using UPS would've cost roughly \$0.50/lb. By combining orders, the delivery cost was reduced to \$0.08/lb, a savings of nearly 84% on shipping alone!

Justin believes that the joint order was incredibly helpful as an early network activity. It demonstrates the potential financial value of having a network, and it was clear that the farmers really appreciated it.

If you're considering organizing a bulk order, the following are critical steps, according to Justin:

1. Choose a supplier: it's important to have a good idea of each supplier's prices, quality, and reliability when you're putting all of everyone's eggs in one basket.
2. Make sure you have enough orders to make a pallet: that is where the savings on shipping can be realized, at least for something like fertilizer and potting soil.
3. Collect the orders: this step should be done by one very detail-oriented person. Excel skills help! Make sure to confirm each order with each farmer to avoid any miscommunications.
4. Figure out a payment system: you'll have a good idea of what each person owes before ordering, but you may not know the exact costs until it's delivered. You may have to adjust after the fact.
5. Find a drop off location: the drop off must have a piece of equipment with pallet forks to unload the delivery, and there must be enough space for the materials to stay, ideally protected from rain, until farmers can pick them up (1-3 days).
6. Inspect and divide the order: Once the items were delivered, Justin went over the delivery piece by piece to confirm that the order was complete. As he was doing this, he marked each bag with the farmer's name to avoid any confusion at pick up.



Photos from Taylor Creek Farm tour organized by the GMFN. Above, Chuck Taylor explains his detailed planting and harvest schedule. Middle, growers inspect soil. Bottom, Chuck Taylor demonstrates the farm's bed shaper.

Justin estimates it took a total of approximately 8 hours to organize for the first time, though he believes it could take him 6 hours the next time around. Next year, he also anticipates applying this experience to joint ordering other items such as potatoes, strawberries and more.

STAYING IN TOUCH

It's clear that the initial one-on-one phone calls made a big difference, but since then the most efficient way for Justin to stay in touch with the network has been through group emails—there are 64 people on the email list—as well as through the [Georgia Mountains Farmers Network blog](#) that he maintains. The benefit of the blog is that it serves as an attractive centralized place for farmers to get information. There is an event calendar, and farmers check out the notes, pictures, and even some audio from past farm tours. And it's getting good traffic—roughly 8-12 views for each new post. The main drawback is that it does not accommodate back and forth dialogue between growers.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Currently, the GMFN is focused on gearing up for a regional community event: a 2-day farm tour for the public to raise awareness about local food and farming. Farmers will volunteer to host an open house and tours for one of the two days. Members of the public will purchase tickets online or at the farmers market and receive a pamphlet with a map and descriptions of each farm. They will also receive a bumper sticker, which serves as their weekend pass and will continue to raise awareness long after the event. Part of the ticket price will include a gift certificate to the two main farmers markets in the area to encourage people to visit the markets in the weeks after the event. A customer can redeem their certificate at any farm stand at participating markets, then the farmer gives the certificate to the market manager to redeem for cash. Then the market manager submits to GMFN for reimbursement.

The tour is modeled after well-established and very successful farm tours in North and South Carolina organized by Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. In addition, for the past few years the Soque River Watershed Association has held a smaller 'Tour of Sustainable Farms' with three local farms. Attendance has been bursting at the seams, so they knew there was a market for it in the region.

Justin says that the decision to choose to focus on the farm tour as a network

grew out of people saying that we want to collaborate on something that boosts the market for all of us. This is the collaborative project with the most benefit—we'll be working together, farmers will get a chance to promote their own farm and products, and we'll demonstrate to the public that we are a vibrant and organized farming community.

Looking further into the future, the network will contin-

ue to meet regularly, organize farm tours and facilitate information exchange between local growers. As for new projects, up for consideration are developing an equipment cooperative (e.g. sharing equipment for applying compost tea), a production cooperative for niche crops (e.g. sunflower oil), and/or pooling products for the metro Atlanta market.

These ambitious goals signal a tension between dreaming big and the challenges of getting such large projects off the ground. Justin says "I really feel that the networks that will succeed in bringing change in their communities are the ones who are able to define who they are and what they're doing...But I'm also trying to remind myself that networks are valuable even if they are just to get-together."

One of the biggest challenges the GMFN faces is the leadership transition. The grant funding from CNG enabled the initial time investment from Justin to bring people together, but the challenge will be to develop a strategy to make it sustainable after the grant is completed. It's clear that farmers are interested in the network but face serious time constraints. In response to suggestions for new network projects, Justin often hears 'well sure! If you're willing to do all that then let's go for it!'

So that farmers feel greater ownership of the network Justin has sought to develop a democratic environment; all the priorities that the network has focused on have been generated by the group. However, as the paid organizer, the responsibility to push things forward has mostly fallen on Justin's shoulders.

One option to transition leadership is to keep it very grassroots, and ask each member to volunteer to take responsibility for a particular aspect of the network. Justin also believes a more defined structure perhaps with officers and a board could be beneficial in the future. By planning events that might generate some revenue, there is also the possibility of using some of the funds to compensate a paid organizer. Justin is hopeful that a successful first year collaborating as a group and developing a sense of community "will set the stage for the leadership to materialize from the folks who are at the table." ■

For more information visit the Georgia Mountains Farmers Network blog at georgiamfn.blogspot.com

MID-HUDSON VALLEY GROWERS NETWORK

Matt Elkin and his wife Liz moved to the Hudson Valley in 2002 with the intention of working on a few farms before starting their own. The farming community they'd come from in California was characterized by strong social ties and a considerable amount of professional networking and business collaboration amongst farmers. They were hoping to find something similar in their new locale.

At the time there were indeed some twilight growers' and CRAFT meetings in the region, but it seemed to Matt that they were "mostly a long drive away, poorly attended, and, to be honest, a little bit awkward." He saw a need for more coordination and support for a growers' network, and went about laying the groundwork for what became the Mid-Hudson Valley Growers Network (MHVGN).

That was in 2002. There were just a handful of member-farmers. Now in 2011 there are more than 20 farms that regularly attend MHVGN's farm tours, potlucks and other gatherings. There are also around 110 members – both current and former growers – who belong to the group's online forum.

GATHERINGS

Farmer gatherings are one of the core elements of the MHVGN. Farm tours are held regularly and host-farms rotate. Matt tries to coordinate tours on farms with a particular draw –

whether it's because the farmer is particularly charismatic or innovative, or the operation is unique in some way. Often the tours will have a particular theme like fertility management, social

tours have been held on a monthly basis during the growing season. Turn out tends to be high early and late in the growing season, but low in the middle part. On a suggestion from a



FIGURE 1 ~ Kate and Ron Kohlsa demonstrate their electric tractor and explain its design to a group of growers at Huguenot Street Farm, New Paltz, NY. (Photo taken by Ron Kohlsa)

media marketing, or on-farm innovations (see Figure 1). Potlucks almost always accompany the tours as a more flexible social time to meet and network with other farmers. In the past, the MHVGN held Tomato Tastings where farmers would bring their favorite tomatoes varieties, both for the fun of it and to sample new varieties for next year (see Figure 2). The MHVGN also tries to end each year with a "What worked? What didn't?" meeting to continue to help and learn from each other. Matt feels there has always been a "good natural balance between building social ties and developing professional camaraderie."

As might be expected for a farmer network, the level of activity varies seasonally. For several years farm

member, the MHVGN is testing out holding fewer gatherings especially during the height of the season with the goal of improving turn out for each one.

It's also worth noting that the MHVGN no longer has *meetings* but instead holds *gatherings*. Make no mistake, the word choice here is important; participation has increased since they made the switch. Matt thinks this is in part because 'meetings' sound more like an obligation and in his experience incredibly busy people (like farmers) tend to bristle at anything that sounds like something to add to their overcrowded To-Do lists. Matt says "It seems to be more successful – at least with this group of people – when it's more laid back."

ONLINE FORUM

When Matt started a yahoo group for the MHVGN in 2004 he says "it felt like a blast into the future." The online message board has turned out to be an incredible communication tool for network members. Farmers can make a post about anything farm-related, such as soliciting advice on choosing squash varieties best suited for local conditions, sourcing the best local inputs, or troubleshooting irrigation pump issues. Then anyone who wants to add to the discussion can respond to the post with their thoughts. In addition, if a member is getting ready to place an order of cover crop seed (or greenhouse trays or soil amendments or livestock feed, etc.), they can use the forum to see who else might be interested in combining orders to get a bulk discount or reduce the cost of shipping.

TIME COMMITMENT

Matt says the time he commits to organizing the network varies seasonally, and has changed significantly since the networks' beginning. Initially, Matt invited local farmers one-by-one through phone calls and snail mail. He did this at a time when he was both apprenticing full-time on a farm as well as helping his wife on another farm. Needless to say time was at a premium. While this early stage of organizing was fairly time intensive — he describes stuffing envelopes during any spare time he could grab, including in the car rides to visit family — it proved to be effective.

As the network became more established and email became more common, the time required to keep the group moving ahead diminished. The yahoo group effectively decentralized

communication within the group. It made it easier for folks to keep in touch with each other with very little time investment on Matt's part. Now, Matt estimates that it takes about 1-2 hours/month to set up farm tours and to manage the forum.



FIGURE 2 ~ Growers sample new tomato varieties at the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, Poughkeepsie, NY. (Photo taken by Matthew Elkin.)

CHALLENGES & BENEFITS

The biggest obstacle to getting more farmers involved in the network is time. Growers work long hard days, and attending a farm tour may take a back seat to one of the many other priorities that farmers are constantly juggling. Some growers just don't see the benefit to them, or they might be interested, but are just hard to get ahold of. The weather also imposes some constraints as some farms don't have a space large enough to host gatherings indoors in case of severe weather. And in some years the fear of spreading diseases from farm to farm, like late blight in 2009, has kept farmers from attending gatherings.

Even with all of these challenges, it's been clear to Matt that the benefits

have made it more than worthwhile. By attending farm tours farmers can exchange ideas and learn important information from each other that can help save time and money in their own operation. The face-to-face interactions at the gatherings create a space for farmers to have fun socializing with one another as well as develop important social ties and in some cases business relationships. Additionally, the MHVGN has facilitated the coordination of bulk orders which provide a direct financial benefit to participants.

ADVICE

For farmers seeking to develop their own network, Matt says it's important to make sure that hosting a gathering is a good experience for the farmer who volunteers to do it. They'll feel it's more worthwhile if there's good turnout so the timing should be planned to make good turnout likely and organizers should be sure to send out reminders. Matt adds "this may sound small, but if folks bring their own plate and utensils for the potluck, it makes a huge difference for the host farmer."

Also, when planning the first gatherings, keep in mind that "farmers have a lot going on already. Make it easy for them to get involved, and keep it simple."

AN AD HOC NETWORK IN WISCONSIN

Meet Michael Noreen. He is the field production manager at Burning River Farm in Frederic, Wisconsin. The farm's eight acres of Certified Naturally Grown veggies supply a 200-member CSA as well as a bustling Saturday farmers market.

In Michael's corner of northwestern Wisconsin, there is a loose network of about 7 or 8 other farms who take a similar approach to farming—they grow fresh, healthy food without chemicals and sell it directly to consumers. The number of like-minded farmers in the area has been growing slowly, but steadily.

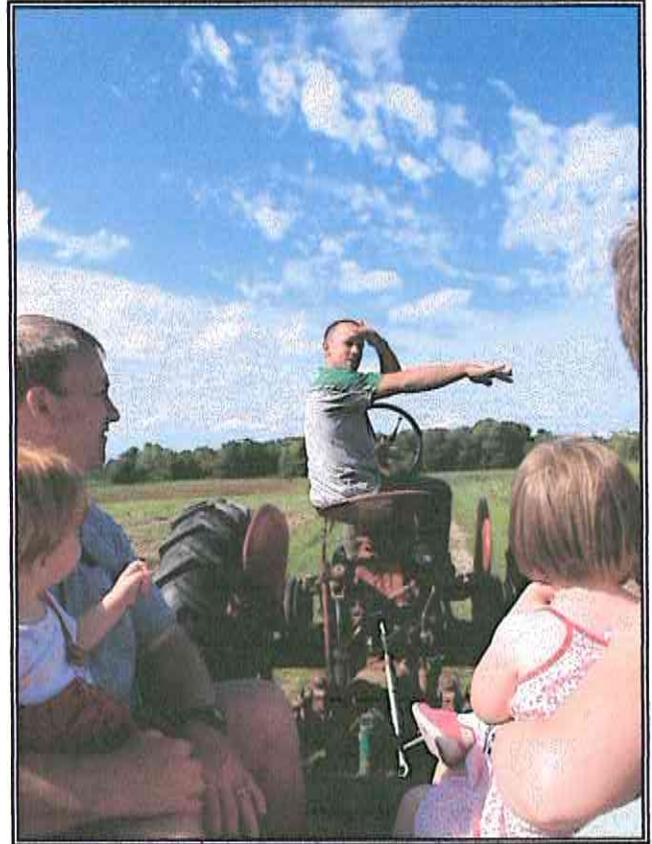
These farmers get in touch mostly on an ad hoc basis to share advice and equipment, or help each other on projects that require extra labor or specialized skill. Often a few farmers will combine their orders for items like potting soil or soil amendments to access a bulk discount or to save on shipping. For Michael joining with other farmers on something like a bulk order is "kind of a no-brainer—it's fairly easy and there's a financial benefit for everyone." The savings can add up to several hundreds of dollars.

Occasionally, some farmers will organize public events like screenings of films related to food systems and local farming. These kinds of public-focused events help raise awareness about local and sustainable food in the broader community and help to bolster the market for all local farmers.

Local farmers also host events that are specifically for farmers. These include field days and farm visits, as well as round-table discussions with focus groups on topics like seed variety selection, soil fertility, harvesting efficiencies, and crew management and hiring. These kinds of events provide a forum for farmers to share and learn from each other.

Aside from the cost savings Michael gets from the knowledge sharing and joint ordering, he also feels he gains an important sense of community. In his words, "it feels good to see others doing similar work. You could feel out on the fringe if you didn't have a network." In an occupation that can be isolating, the value of feeling part of a community should not be underestimated.

As for advice to others interested in forming their own local network, Michael says "it's important to just get out there and talk to people, and to take the time to see where ideas go." And that goes for farmers using natural practices as well as those farming conventionally. Michael maintains that even if you have concerns about some of their practices, "you've got to let them in, share what you're doing, but not in an aggressive preachy way, just be a good neighbor. And then they'll have a better idea of what you're doing and might even try some of it—they might even get to like your kale. You don't have to just be friends with organic growers." ■



THE CENTER FOR HONEYBEE RESEARCH

~A Local Network Laying the Groundwork to Expand~

North Carolina has one of the highest concentrations of beekeepers in the country, mostly small-scale producers and hobbyists. So it's no surprise that a grassroots organization dedicated to natural beekeeping would spring up in North Carolina. Currently, the Center for Honey Bee Research (CHBR) is largely local but Carl Chesick, its President, along with CHBR's board is carefully laying the groundwork for their vision of a national-scale research collaborative.

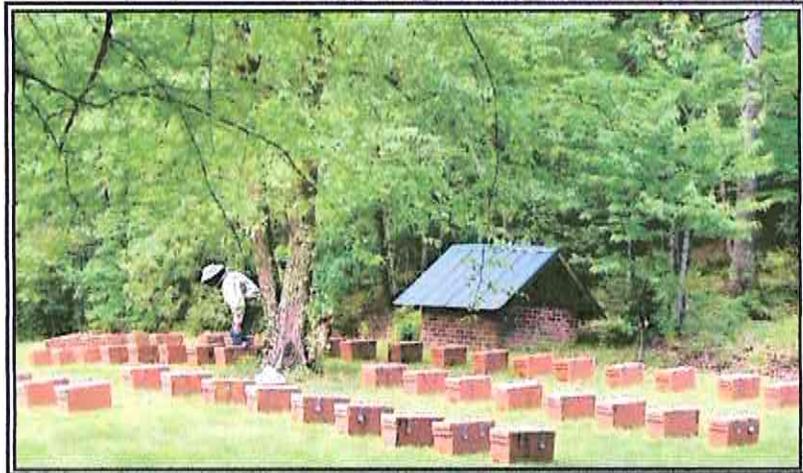
Carl Chesick and his wife Joan have been gardening and farming in North Carolina for 27 years. Starting in 1984 with a ¼ acre garden, they now have expanded to 7 acres dedicated to vegetables, fruit, nuts, and honey on Green Goddess Farm. Honey bees first drew Carl's interest in 2003 after a conversation with a neighboring beekeeper about the alarming crash in bee populations. Carl says

That's when I first really put two and two together in terms of the pollination that honey bees do and the affect it has on crops. I had been noticing a large number of my cucumbers were deformed and misshapen and I'd always assumed it was from disease or maybe something missing from the soil. But I learned that to be properly pollinated, a cucumber flower must be visited 11 different times by a pollinator and if it doesn't get that, the fruit won't be properly formed.

Each year the Buncombe County Beekeepers Club offered free Bee School for beginners, and Carl says "so I figured I'd go to Bee School and learn all there was to it!" After a few months with his new hive, Carl

discovered that his hive had died and what he had proudly assumed was the busy comings-and-goings of his bees was in reality the comings-and-

After attending the same classes at the Bee School for several seasons, Carl began to see the need for the club to offer an advanced bee



Beekeepers brought nucleus colonies with mite-resistant stock to western North Carolina. Photo taken by NC Master Beekeeper Diane Almond, 2011.

goings of bees from elsewhere who were happily robbing his hive. He realized that beekeeping might be more complicated than he'd originally thought.

In the Bee School classes Carl was shocked by the emphasis on pesticide treatments coming from the instructors. Early on, Carl and Joan decided to try out beekeeping without pesticides, and all his mentors predicted that the hive would die within a few weeks or months at the most. Despite mite levels more than double the threshold that the experts said required pesticide treatment, Carl and Joan's hive survived not only the next few months, but the next three years. With this success and consistently low loss rates, he drew other local beekeepers interested in natural methods.

school, and hopefully one with an emphasis on natural beekeeping. He envisioned inviting honeybee researchers, breeders, and experts from the greater North Carolina region and across the country, from Arizona to Wyoming to Florida and France. There was some resistance from parts of the Buncombe County Bee Club, but with persistence Carl won enough support to push ahead and the first expanded bee school took place in 2006.

The first obstacle to the advanced beekeeping conference was cost. The Bee Club asked local businesses to buy sponsorships for \$250. In return, the company's name would appear on the conference's website and programs. The sponsoring businesses could count the expense as advertising and therefore deduct the expense from their taxes, even though the

Beekeepers Conference did not yet have their status as a 501(c)3 non-profit.

With conference attendance reaching 175-200 people each year, it became apparent that the conference was large enough to become its own entity. The Buncombe County Beekeepers Chap-

Ambassador, Lady Spirit Moon, traveled to Italy in 2011 to establish relationships with the country's major beekeeping organizations, honey cooperatives and bee experts working on small-cell foundation and varroa mite research. Having this national and international network of contacts is es-

researchers, the CHBR would design an experimental model that could be easily replicated and implemented by volunteers. Volunteers would be trained to appropriately manage experimental hives at sites scattered throughout the area, and to record detailed data. This all would require grant funding to supply the equipment and materials (queens, combs, and hives) as well as to hire a Project Coordinator to train volunteers and oversee the research.

Though the Center for Honeybee Research has made great strides already, the Center continues to face many challenges to establishing a research collaborative. Among these challenges are finding enough appropriate bee stock and chemical-free comb for large-scale trials, securing funding, and coordinating and training a volunteer labor force. However, Carl and the CHBR's board are carefully laying a solid foundation to for a successful endeavor. Carl says

Right now we are a local network, but that is not our final goal. We hope to expand to the region and then nationally. We have a big vision, but we're taking small steps, trying to put the building blocks in place. We want to build credibility and grow carefully, to make something that will last.

For more information, visit www.CHBR.org ■



The panel of judges and the winning entries of the 2011 Black Jar Honey Contest.

ter appointed Carl to create and incorporate a full-fledged non-profit that became the Center for Honeybee Research. The CHBR was officially incorporated in December of 2010, and was officially approved for 501(c)3 tax exempt status in August 2011.

In 2011, the CHBR launched a Black Jar Honey Contest where local honey is tasted and judged by a panel of local leaders of the local food movement, including chefs, journalists, and non-profit and business leaders. The hope is that the contest will raise awareness about local honey, and help expand the market for small scale beekeepers.

The CHBR's central activity remains the annual conference in Asheville, North Carolina –the theme for 2011 is "What turns bees on" – which continues to attract leading experts in the field. The conference is both an opportunity for learning and chance to build relationships with experts. The CHBR is reaching out to bee experts internationally as well. The CHBR's

essential for the Center's larger goal of establishing a collaborative research network.

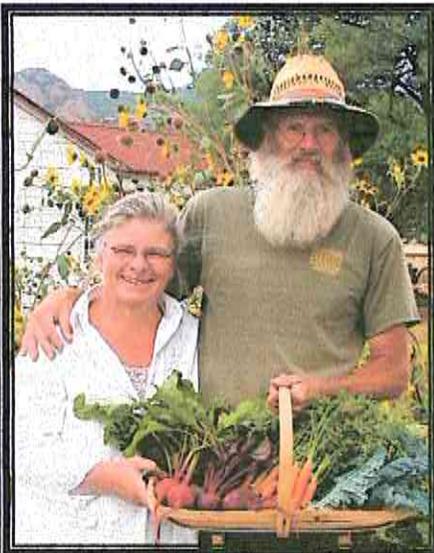
In a collaborative research network several individuals and institutions combine resources to conduct an agreed upon experiment that would not be possible to conduct by any of the participants alone because of time, space or financial constraints. The Center for Honeybee Research would aim to address gaps in the honey bee research by capitalizing on the resources available. Carl says "We have 600 beekeepers in Buncombe County, that's a lot of motivated people. If we could mobilize even a fraction of those, we'd have all the volunteer manpower necessary."

To begin with CHBR would select a question to investigate. In Carl's words, the question chosen "should be something basic, but novel. It should be something important and relevant to beekeepers." Then in consultation with their network of preeminent bee

SOUTHWESTERN COLORADO GROWERS

An Expansive & Dynamic Local Farmers Network

Networks are not static. They continue to evolve and change overtime, sometimes in unexpected ways. That is the case with the network of local farmers in Southwestern Colorado. We got a chance to hear about it from Mary Vozar, who has lived and grown vegetables in Montezuma County for 25 years. She is currently farming 2 acres of vegetables on Confluence Farm along with her partner, Paul Bohman. Their local network has taken many forms over the years, and continues to grow and change.



Mary Vozar and Paul Bohman pictured at Confluence Farm.

Establishing Relationships

The initial impetus for a local network came from a local organic gardener named Nancy McGill who founded an Organic Growers Club in 2005-2006. To begin with, Nancy organized meetings and potlucks once a month in the winter. The gatherings attracted many gardeners, hobbyists, and farmers. At first the group was very loose and informal. Mary says it was not “the

kind that kept minutes or had officers. None of us were interested in that.” However, there were clearly big benefits early on. According to Mary, “The meetings helped with networking between growers, and it helped CNG farmers connect with each other. There was a lot of education and knowledge sharing – that’s how I found out about CNG and how I found Fedco- and a real sense of community.”

From the connections formed during these gatherings, farmers began to collaborate in new ways. They organized bulk orders of supplies together and rotated pick-up responsibilities, saving each farmer time and money. Farmers also began to host tours in the spring and summer. Mary felt that the tours were important “opportunities to see what people were doing, how they were doing it, and really get into the nitty-gritty of it.” Later on the group began collecting membership dues to provide a modest honorarium (usually in the form of a gift card to the local nursery or garden center) for guest speakers to give presentations on topics such as composting, cover crops, herbs, or trees best-suited to their climate southwestern climate.

As the group became more organized, they took on bigger projects. For three years they published a Local Foods Directory, and offered it for free at several locations around town. The hope was that the tourism board or another organization would take over the project, but this didn’t hap-



Michele Martz representing SongHaven Farm at the Cortez Farmers Market.

pen. Though they were able to secure funds from the county tourism board for the printing, the actual development of the guide itself fell to the members of the group. Because of the tremendous time investment this required, they decided not to continue the guide.

Though their accomplishments were many, being all volunteer put a large burden on a few people. Nancy sought to encourage others to take active roles, however, when she moved away after a few years later, no one had the time or inclination to take her place as the central organizer, and the groups stopped meeting regularly.

Re-Focusing & Looking Ahead

After the Organic Growers Group stopped meeting the group split roughly between gardeners and farmers. Many of the gardeners went on to the Mesa Verde Gardeners Group, which up until then had mostly focused on flowers but has now expanded to reflect the interests of its new members.

As for the farmers, based on the relationships they had formed within the

group, some farmers began to pool their products to supply restaurant accounts. One of the members of the former Organic Growers Group, Laurie Hall, operates a well-known bistro, "The Farm" with her husband, Rusty. Much of the produce they serve comes from their own farm, Seven Meadows Farm. With her restaurant and farming experience, Laurie was in the perfect position to bridge the gap between restaurants and local producers. She was marketing salad greens from Seven Meadows Farm to other restaurants and began organizing a handful of other growers to pool their prod-

easier for the farmers too; they can be part of a group offering a greater volume and variety, and they don't have to worry about communication or deliveries.

Three of the farmers also became founding members of a new initiative in the region, the Ag Roundtable, which started in the winter of 2011. The Dolores Conservation District initiated the first few meetings of the Ag Roundtable by gathering stakeholders and supplying a professional facilitator to help the community brainstorm what they need and want for the region's agricultural future. Some of the ideas that were put forward include sharing equipment, increasing mobile poultry processing capacity, and starting a farmers' cooperative. They chose to focus on the farmers' cooperative, and outlined a preliminary vision that includes a year-round retail storefront, shared storage and distribution facilities, a multi-producer CSA and coordinating wholesale accounts.

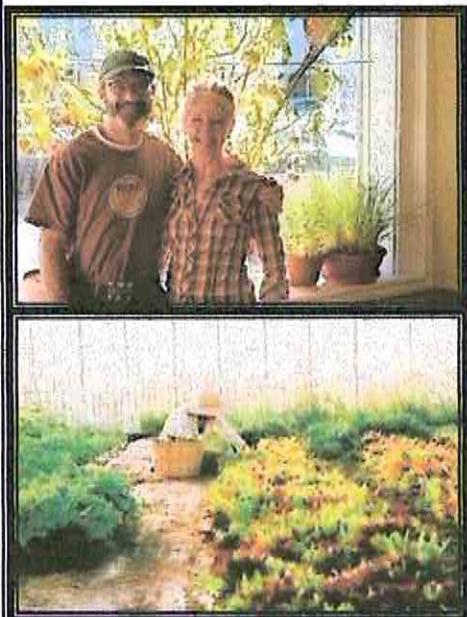
The potential benefits of such a project are similar to those of pooling products to supply local restaurants, but several times greater. The cooperative could offer a greater variety and volume for restaurants and grocery stores and a central pickup and distribution center. The shared cold storage space would also allow the large costs of infrastructure investments to be shared among growers, and help small growers reap the benefits of economies of scale.

There are several challenges though as well. The upfront cost is the primary one. Another is that the planning and operation of a cooperative would require dedicated staff, rather than farmer's volunteering their time as they can. More broadly, a cooperative of this nature would face the same challenge that local food suppliers face across the country – how to ensure consistent year round quality and availability for buyers.

As a first step, the group is conducting a farmer's cooperative feasibility study with funds provided by matching grants from one local/state organization called [LiveWell Montezuma](#), and the [Rocky Mountain Farmers Union](#) that has a regional reach. The funding is primarily to hire a part-time Coordinator. Mary feels it's an enormous benefit to have someone conducting the study that is not a farmer herself and is paid for her time, and so can dedicate the time to the project that it deserves.

There is also a beginning Farm-to-School program in the region, in which LiveWell Montezuma is also very involved ([see article in the Cortez Journal](#)). At least 10 local farms have sold items such as lettuce, tomatoes, melons, and ground beef to the school district. As part of the program, they've made posters with photos and descriptions of each farm that supplies the school to give the farmers a face and a story. There are still many issues to resolve, particularly the price that schools are able to pay for food as their budgets are squeezed as well as the capacity of school kitchens to prepare fresh produce. While the program is just in its beginning stages and many challenges remain, they are laying the foundation for what will hopefully be a lasting relationship between school food programs and local producers.

The farmers network in Southwestern Colorado has grown and changed over the years, starting with social potluck gatherings and discussion groups; expanding to farm tours, bulk orders, and a local food guide; pooling products from multiple producers; and now exploring the possibility of forming a farmer cooperative. It seems it will grow and change much more in the years to come! ■



Top: Rusty and Laurie Hall of Seven Meadows Farm. Bottom: Harvesting greenhouse lettuce at Seven Meadows.

ucts to supply the restaurants as well. Each week during the growing season, the farmers email their crop availability and price list to Laurie, who then consolidates the list for the restaurant buyers. Once the orders have been placed, Laurie also coordinates the pickups and deliveries, for which she charges the farms a small fee for the gas and her time. The arrangement simplifies the process enormously for restaurants who want local food, but not the headache of dealing in small quantities from multiple vendors. It makes it

This bookmark was printed professionally on 8" x 2" glossy card. It was distributed at events, and was sent to many of our CNG farmers along with new member welcome packets and marketing material orders. It is intended to encourage farmers to become involved in their local networks and to provide access to the resource materials developed under this grant.



CNG Field Day, Taylor Creek Farm, GA

Local networks help farms succeed **Don't farm alone**

Contact Certified Naturally Grown to connect to a local network near you.

community.naturallygrown.org or 845-687-2058



Farmers Network Bookmark (front)



Local Farmers Network \lō-kəl fār-mərs net-,wərk\ *n.* A group of farmers linked together to exchange information, collaborate, make joint purchases, and create a sense of community.

Save money.

Have fun.

Farm better.

community.naturallygrown.org or 845-687-2058

Farmers Network Bookmark (back)



CNG Network Organizers - Short Bios

In 2010, CNG received a grant from the Farmers Market Promotion Program to hire organizers in Georgia and Tennessee so they could develop and strengthen farmers networks in their communities. Through their experiences, CNG hopes to learn about what it takes to develop a successful network and spread that knowledge to farmers seeking to build their own local farmers network. We're proud of the amazing folks we found to work with us!



Tennessee Grower's Consortium
David Schimp

David is a chiropractic physician with an interest in the therapeutic and nutritional value of whole foods. In 2009, David moved his family from a corner lot in the city to a quaint farming community about an hour from Nashville, Tennessee. The goal: Develop the family unit by working together in the soil. Today, David and his 5 children operate an organic CSA called Nourishing Harvest Farm. The family's bold move from "green" city slickers to sustainable farmers was assisted by many kind hearts that had walked the path before them. Today, from his off-the-grid solar farm, using renewable energy sources harvested by the labor of his family's hands, David has become facilitator of a group called the Tennessee Grower's Consortium. The Consortium is about "giving back" and helping others "learn the ropes". Our mission, purpose and

goal is to encourage and help one another as we walk the path of sustainability by joining together in ventures, sharing resources and freely exchanging information and ideas. See what's happening on the [Tennessee Grower's Consortium Facebook page](#).



Georgia Mountains Farmers Network
Justin Ellis

Justin is a small scale grower for Soque Lower Gardens!, the co-manager of the Northeast Georgia Locally Grown online farmer's market, and most recently a Farmer Network Organizer for Certified Naturally Grown. He's also had the good fortune to help create Clarkesville's Green Way Community Garden, serve on the Cannery Design Committee and establish value added processing as a new use allowed at the facility, visit over 50 farms during a 4-month, 5,000 mile bicycle farm tour of the U.S., and when he's not too busy, he is trying to get his graduate degree from the University of Georgia researching the role of innovations in the development of local food systems.

Read more about the [Georgia Mountains Farmers Network](#) and check out the [GMFN blog](#).



Athens Area Farmers Network
Kate Munden-Dixon

Kate is a native of Savannah, Georgia where she grew up eating fresh seafood and paddling the surrounding ocean waterways. A transplant in Athens, Georgia since 2004 she has obtained both her Bachelor and Master degrees at The University of Georgia focusing on regional food systems and sustainable agriculture. She currently works with P.L.A.C.E. (Promoting Local Agriculture and Cultural Experiences) as the Program Director where she coordinates various programs that increase access of local, sustainable food to all populations in Athens. She also works at The University of Georgia as the SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Program Assistant where she assists extension agents and farmers in Georgia who are involved or interested in sustainable agriculture. In her spare time, she loves to cook large meals with friends, rock climb, and go camping with her brindled pup, Raja.

Read more about the [Athens Area Farmers Network](#).



Georgia Growers (northcentral Georgia)
Michele Gilman

Michele is originally from the Carolinas and moved to Cumming, Georgia in 1995. Her professional background is in marketing and sales, but she became passionate about fresh local food after her husband was involved in a cycling incident and organic and raw foods played a big part in his recovery. Currently, Michele splits her time between 2 farms – Cane Creek Farm and Moss Hill Farm – where her primary role is harvest coordinator. She also manages volunteers and farm crew, participates in the full range of field work, and helps with outreach and marketing. Michele is also a cyclist; when she gets home from work at the farm she spends her time training either on the road or in the gym. Michelle says "When I started volunteering and then became an employee at sustainable farms I realized the importance of the locally grown movement and that I could be a voice, helping to spread the word. Growing without all of the "bides" matters, supporting local businesses matters, eating the freshest and most nutritious food matters."

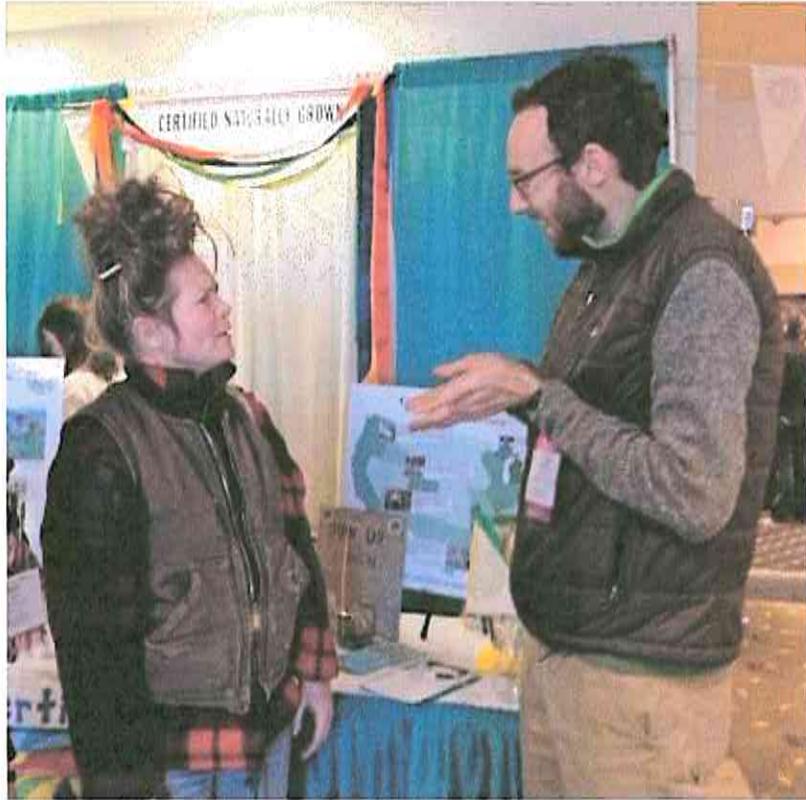
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Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers
Butch Tolley

Butch began farming while working a work share at Sequatchie Cove Farm in Sequatchie, Tennessee. He then moved his family back to Clover Wreath Farm in Cleveland, Tennessee. While there they began to put the farm back into production beginning with selling eggs and later adding vegetables and dairy sheep. While living at Clover Wreath Farm Butch also worked at GreenLife Grocery in Chattanooga, Tennessee in their produce department where he came in contact with many of the area's local farmers. Wanting to further support the local farmers and find ways to increase the production and consumption of local food, Butch helped found the Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers in 2010. Since then he has been developing CSF and working with farmers to find new ways to support the local food economy in the Chattanooga Area.

David Weisberger, CNG's Network Coordinator, speaks with Margaret Schlass of One Woman Farm at the PASA Conference in February 2013:





The Grassroots Alternative to Certified Organic



CNG Webinar Series: Organize a Farm Tour

The slide features a large circular logo at the top center with the text "CERTIFIED NATURALLY GROWN" around a central image of a sun rising over a field with a red barn. Below the logo is the text "The Grassroots Alternative to Certified Organic". At the bottom left is a smaller version of the logo, and at the bottom center is the text "CNG Webinar Series: Organize a Farm Tour". The background is a landscape with a blue sky, distant mountains, and a yellow field.



You Too
Can Organize a Farm Tour
in five short months

CNG presentation
By Justin Ellis
February 2013

The slide features a portrait of Justin Ellis, a man with dark hair and sunglasses, wearing a black leather jacket. The text "You Too Can Organize a Farm Tour in five short months" is centered on the slide. The background is a field of tall grasses. At the bottom left, it says "CNG presentation By Justin Ellis February 2013".

Background



Began collecting information for formation of a farmers network in October 2011.



Held first meeting January 25th, 2012

Format is > FARM TOUR > POTLUCK > MEETING

Conducted phone survey of what farmers wanted to see a farmer's network accomplish. Used feedback to populate a list of priorities.

Possible Activities for a Growers Network or what would you like a Growers Network to accomplish?

11 priorities

- Cooperative Marketing efforts (8 VOTES)**
Example- Develop systems for bulk deliveries to ATL area, restaurants, etc.
- Coordinating Bulk Orders (7 VOTES)**
To increase availability and reduce shipping on amendments, supplies, seeds, potatoes, onions)
- Share up-to-date Contact Lists (6 VOTES)**
That includes other farmers, but also restaurants who buy local, local suppliers, technical experts, etc.
- Host Farm Tours (5 VOTES)**
Specifically for GROWERS (focused on sharing information)
- Acquisition and Sharing of Equipment (5 VOTES)**
Such as compost tea sprayers, bed shapers, others?
- Obtaining or Producing Organic Feed (5 VOTES)**
It is difficult and costly to obtain organic feed easily.
- Organization of Crop Mobs (4 VOTES)**
Labor assistance. Bringing volunteers to your farm to have them work on a project or weed for an afternoon.
- Create Forums for more frequent Farmer Communication (3 VOTES)**
Possibly launch a Yahoo Group or website so that we can post information for each other to see.
- Developing Marketing as a Group (2 VOTES)**
Co-branding regional products like a logo, identity
- Organizing specific and technical workshops (1 VOTE)**
Bringing in experts from other areas
- Hosting Public Events (THIS WASN'T AN OPTION AT TIME OF VOTING)**
Increase customer base / awareness

Growers Network PRIORITIES
or what would you like a Growers Network to accomplish?

The Top 5

#1 - Host Farm Tours
 We've hosted 4 grower tours/potlucks.

#2 - Coordinating Bulk Orders
 One bulk order – February 2012

#3 - Create Forums for more frequent Farmer Communication
 The website / blogsite has been key! There have been over two dozen posts often copies of e-mails I send out. Announce tours, events, post information. Facebook not useful for most farms, but great for interaction with the public

#4 - Hosting Public Events – The Georgia Mountains Farm Tour helped create a sense of unity of purpose and pride in our region. Goal is to increase customer base / awareness

#5 - Cooperative Marketing efforts
 Little or No Interest in wholesale markets. Focused on internet market expansion into Gainseville (nearest urban market)

Share up-to-date Contact Lists
 Still haven't done this yet

Acquisition and Sharing of Equipment
 Still haven't done this yet. Discussed potato harvester

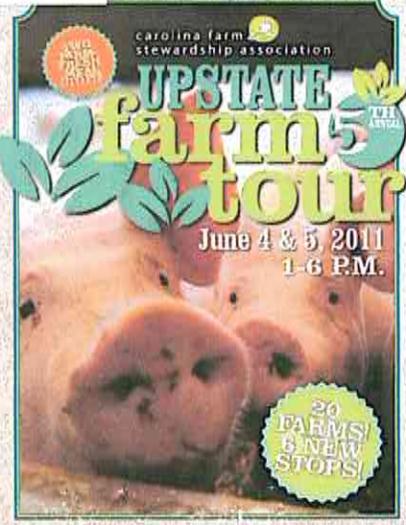
Obtaining or Producing Organic Feed
 Still haven't done this yet. No progress.

Organization of Crop Mobs
 Still haven't done this yet. No progress

Developing Marketing as a Group
 Still haven't done this yet. No progress

Organizing specific and technical workshops
 Still haven't done this yet. Most interested in Business trainings.

How to get started

- Steal every idea you can
- Started with Dates / Times
- Start a list of every Farm you'd like to participate
- Number of Farms
- What to Charge?
- How to know they've paid

FOCUS ON BROCHURE



- 80% of the event is planned during the layout of the brochure
- Did all layout myself using Adobe InDesign
- Brochure, Poster, other promotion pieces took me close to 40 hours
- Paid \$150 for truck farmer artwork

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour
 Saturday June 30th & Sunday July 1st

1 LOGANBERRY HERITAGE FARM
 Herbs, Vegetables, Flowers, Eggs
 2640 Adam Road
 Cleveland, GA 30528
 706-858-8288
www.loganberryheritagefarm.com
 Loganberry Heritage Farm is a 4th generation Appalachian farm grows a wide variety of quality heirloom produce including, garlic, turk, squash, herbs, eggs, pickled peaches and grass fed beef. In season, we open our farm to visit. Market to sell our weekly offerings. Our farming practices use nature as model and include a combination of organic and biodynamic methods, focusing on using nature's energies to produce healthy food and sustain healthy soil. Market hours in season are Saturdays 9am to 1pm.
Directions: Take I-75 from Cleveland for 2 miles, turn right onto Town Creek Rd. and drive on left.

2 MOUNTAIN FRESH CREAMERY
 Dairy Cattle
 10000 S. 10th Street
 8411 Cleveland Hwy
 Cleveland GA 30517
 770-868-1800
www.mountainfreshcreamery.com
 Come visit our creamery our farm is a few miles away and won't be on the tour this year but we keep a few cows home at the creamery where we process milk from our own cows into butter, low fat and chocolate milk, ice cream, heavy cream, butter and everyone's favorite ice cream! All products are non-homogenized and are long pasteurized, from milk that is all natural and contains no hormones or antibiotics. We like to say the "milk is so fresh the cow doesn't even know it's gone."
Directions: While on Hwy 109, 7 miles south of Cleveland, head left on right.

3 NACOOCHIE VALLEY FARM
 Sheep, Hogs, Eggs, Goats
 1844 Highway 27
 Dalton, GA
 706-818-1000
www.nacoochievalleyfarm.com
 Nacoochie Valley Farm raises horses and more than farm equipment, and produce free range laying hens, goats and sheep, cattle and a small group of hogs maintained in small outdoor pens. We try to raise most of our small grains for feeding draft horses, mules, sheep, cows and pigs. During the tour we'll demonstrate the use of small scale farming where animal powered equipment can reduce pollution and fuel consumption and be regarded as part of a small sustainable working farm.
Directions: Located on Hwy 17 just one mile north of the Dalton Nacoochie village (at Hwy 285). The farm entrance is on the left.

4 CAIRN ROCK FARM
 Vegetables, Herbs, Eggs
 1100 Highway 215
 North Newberry, GA 30557
 706-858-1107
www.cairnrockfarm.com
 We are a 4th generation family of individuals, every member of the children that help out plant and our needs as a spouse to proper nutritional maintenance. We take pride in working the soil to hand, when soil is healthy, biodynamic, sowing & transplanting practices. We utilize sustainable practices through our CSA, and at local Farmer's Markets in Dalton and Chickasaw.
Directions: Take Hwy 215 N off of I-75 about a mile past the Dalton Nacoochie Community Center. Pull in the Street House for parking and drive to the old apple trees. The farm is located behind the house.

5 INDIAN RIDGE FARM
 Vegetables, Fruits, Wild Herbs
 Ed Taylor & Michael Jurek
 1478 Indian Road
 Chickasaw, GA 30113
 (770) 754-7403
www.indianridgefarm.com
 Indian Ridge Farm is a 2-acre certified organic vegetable farm that also specializes in and grows crops such as: chocolate mushrooms, and 15 varieties of "hot" colored sweet! Our farm practices biodynamic farming, and utilizes a High Tunnel with raised beds, benches for honey production, herbaceous, ground machine for fertility and many other interesting family activities. The garden is a 300 yard walk down a mud hill so be prepared for some walking.
Directions: From Chickasaw, Hwy 17 N towards Dalton, 0.7 miles after the Dalton Line Lane use Rt 146 a L on Highway 146/Indian Lane. Park in the parking lot. At end of Indian Lane L (Myrtle) and go right. At end of road turn left at One Star.

6 ROYAL OAKS FARM
 Herbs, Vegetables, Flowers, Eggs
 Robert & Deborah Blandford
 1114 Highway 17
 Chickasaw, GA 30113
 770-519-1888
www.royaloaksfarm.com
 Royal Oaks is a small family farm that produces delicious produce for our own use and to sell. We use sustainable techniques and grow in raised beds, this year trying vertical gardening. Our farm demonstrates how much can be grown in small spaces. We also have free range chickens. Bring a picnic lunch and enjoy the view of the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. A small lake is also available for fishing during your evening and morning walk. All proceeds from produce sold at Royal Oaks goes to the mountain farm.
Directions: Located on Hwy 17 between Dalton and Chickasaw at mile marker 17. One mile past 54, 29, 236 (State Creek Road) turn left into the first lane and go to the first garden.

FOCUS ON BROCHURE

- Had farmers submit their own descriptions, directions, products, and amenities.
- Edited to fit (might should give them a word count limit).
- Farms only did Saturday or Sunday allowing them to visit each others farms.
- Had problems with accurate directions.

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour

HOW TO TAKE THE TOUR:
LOAD UP A CAR WITH YOUR FRIENDS OR FAMILY. LOCATE EACH FARM ON THE PROVIDED MAP AND DRIVE WITHIN THE VISIBLE MAP.

You can choose which farms you'd like to visit and in any order you like as long as they are featured that day. Check schedule for which farms are featured Saturday and which farms are featured Sunday.

- Tour is \$30 per vehicle for all drivers, all passengers (at least one paid driver).
- Tour is \$25 per driver after June 14th.
- All vehicles must have a valid driver's license.
- \$5.00 cash tip for driver will be recommended at the end of the tour. (Optional - you may tip more if you wish.)
- You'll receive an I-95 WILL BUY LOCAL sticker (check that you're in your local area) that you can use to promote local products.

BUY YOUR WEATHER PASS IN ADVANCE AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:
online at WWW.SQQUE.ORG or [HTTP://GEORGIAMTN.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://GEORGIAMTN.BLOGSPOT.COM)

TOUR INFO:
Reservations on the square of 100 seats.
Map: www.sqque.org
sq.sqque.net

Our location:
114 N. Mountain Dr., Dalton, GA 30705
Phone: (706) 271-1144
Mountain City Mall - Saturdays
Mountain Park Center
6415 Cleveland Hwy
Chattanooga, GA 37427

**For details email Beth at 114 N. Mountain Dr. Watershed Association
watershed@sqque.net
706-254-3382**

You can do it all other options to join us with:

Important TIPS TO PLAN for THE TOUR

- 1. Due to the number of farms on the tour, you will likely not have time to visit every farm. Plan on 3-4 farms per day, allowing 1-2 hours per farm depending on traffic time.
- 2. Take some time to read the farm descriptions and study the map. You'll see that we have included clusters of farms to help you make the most of your time. Choose a region that you'd like to visit, or pick a farm that most appeals to you, and plan additional stops nearby.
- 3. Remember that GPS is not always your friend in rural areas! We have included detailed directions to help you find your way quickly and easily, but you may want to research specific farms to farm directions. Each farm will have a large balloon hanging at a key location to give you confidence that you have found your way.
- 4. Tour hours are from 9am to 5pm both days of the tour. Please do not arrive before or after tour hours. And double check to make sure you're visiting the right farms on the right days. We have different farms featured Saturday and Sunday.
- 5. Nearly every farm on the tour will bring you with farm-fresh produce, meats, dairy, and grocery products available for purchase. Remember to pack a cooler with ice in the car so you don't miss this special opportunity to stock up on the very best from local producers!

KEY:

Restrooms Available	Food or Meal Stop
62 Appeal	Food Items For Sale

HOW TOUR WORKS

- \$30 per vehicle – get a brochure and a sticker.



- Sold 15 of 50 passes in advance through a web payment system. (mailed brochures)
- Partners are key for advance sales. Farmers markets, restaurants, creamery distributed and collected money.

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour

HOW TO TAKE THE TOUR:
LOAD UP A CAR WITH YOUR FRIENDS OR FAMILY. LOCATE EACH FARM ON THE PROVIDED MAP AND DRIVE WITHIN THE VISIBLE MAP.

You can choose which farms you'd like to visit and in any order you like as long as they are featured that day. Check schedule for which farms are featured Saturday and which farms are featured Sunday.

- Tour is \$30 per vehicle for all drivers, all passengers (at least one paid driver).
- Tour is \$25 per driver after June 14th.
- All vehicles must have a valid driver's license.
- \$5.00 cash tip for driver will be recommended at the end of the tour. (Optional - you may tip more if you wish.)
- You'll receive an I-95 WILL BUY LOCAL sticker (check that you're in your local area) that you can use to promote local products.

BUY YOUR WEATHER PASS IN ADVANCE AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:
online at WWW.SQQUE.ORG or [HTTP://GEORGIAMTN.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://GEORGIAMTN.BLOGSPOT.COM)

TOUR INFO:
Reservations on the square of 100 seats.
Map: www.sqque.org
sq.sqque.net

Our location:
114 N. Mountain Dr., Dalton, GA 30705
Phone: (706) 271-1144
Mountain City Mall - Saturdays
Mountain Park Center
6415 Cleveland Hwy
Chattanooga, GA 37427

**For details email Beth at 114 N. Mountain Dr. Watershed Association
watershed@sqque.net
706-254-3382**

You can do it all other options to join us with:

Important TIPS TO PLAN for THE TOUR

- 1. Due to the number of farms on the tour, you will likely not have time to visit every farm. Plan on 3-4 farms per day, allowing 1-2 hours per farm depending on traffic time.
- 2. Take some time to read the farm descriptions and study the map. You'll see that we have included clusters of farms to help you make the most of your time. Choose a region that you'd like to visit, or pick a farm that most appeals to you, and plan additional stops nearby.
- 3. Remember that GPS is not always your friend in rural areas! We have included detailed directions to help you find your way quickly and easily, but you may want to research specific farms to farm directions. Each farm will have a large balloon hanging at a key location to give you confidence that you have found your way.
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KEY:

Restrooms Available	Food or Meal Stop
62 Appeal	Food Items For Sale

HOW TOUR WORKS

- Used 3 red balloons (w/ out helium) to hang at farm entrance (need signs).
- Tour Hours were 1-6pm (due to markets on Sat.)
- Encouraged to bring coolers.
- Meal Stops Each Day by local chefs.
- No pets, no smoking, no picking, etc.

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour



Farm Locator

Saturday June 30th

1. Lowndesville Heritage Farm
2000 Road 600 West
Lowndesville, GA 30058
2. Mountain Fresh Creamery
4000 Mountain View
Cherokee, GA 30517
3. Pigeonhole Valley Farm
1000 Highway 17
Waco, GA 30097
4. Clary Rock Farm
1126 Highway 71A N
Walker Mountain, GA 30091
5. Indian Ridge Farm
1075 Indian Ridge Road
Lakeland, GA 30024

Sunday July 1st

6. Rural Oaks Farm
1416 Highway 11
Claxtonville, GA 30424
7. Milton Head Farm
1000 Milton Road
Claxtonville, GA 30424
8. Green Way Community Garden
185 East Street
Fayetteville, GA 30211
9. Cornerful Gardens (MSAL, STCP)
1100 Highway 200
Fayetteville, GA 30211
10. Cedar Hill Enrichment Center
12711 Stonecreek Highway
Fayetteville, GA 30211
11. Art and Zen's Garden
27 South Church Rd
www.artzen.org 30211
12. Taylor Creek Farm
2004 Sandbar Rd
Lawson, GA 30057
13. Goslin Farms
218 North Kirkland Road
Milledgeville, GA 30251
14. Lash Lakes Farm
4000 Highway 60
Claxtonville, GA 30424
15. Skyway Farm Farm
118 Highway 11
Milledgeville, GA 30251
16. Barton Mountain Farm
2000 Barton Road
Fayetteville, GA 30211
17. Old School Garden
1000 N. Main St
Fayetteville, GA 30211
18. Lolo's Italian Trattoria & Restaurant
85 Roberts Lane
Lakeland, GA 30024

Goal of the "first ever" Georgia Mountains Farm Tour - We greatly appreciate your interest in local foods, and local farms here in the heart of the center of the beautiful Georgia Mountains. This tour is the product of local food producers from a wide area, beginning to meet regularly, to exchange ideas and resources on projects that will directly help to increase the impact of local food here in our area. We hope that this tour may introduce people for the first time to the vibrancy and the organization of the local food movement here in the Georgia Mountains. By attending, you are playing a big part in the growth of local food and farms. Thank You!

- Our tour had 18 farms
- Completed Map Last
- Segmented Tour into southerly farms on Saturday and northerly farms on Sunday.
- Each farm was required to have 3 volunteers. One person to help direct cars and receive guests, another to welcome them at a staging area and one to give the tour.

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour

Liability Waiver & Release Form

On behalf of myself and my executors, administrators, heirs, next of kin, successors, assigns, I hereby waive, release, and discharge the Farm Owners, the Georgia Mountains Farmers Network and the Soque River Watershed Association (non profit sponsor) and its staff, members, volunteers and directors, from any and all liability for the death, disability, personal injury, property damage, property theft, or actions of any kind which may hereafter accrue to me named below. I hereby assume full responsibility for any risk of bodily injury, death, or property damage, now and forever, arising during participation of this farm tour and any other related activities, including volunteer activities, whether foreseen or unforeseen and whether caused by negligence of Releasee or otherwise.

I, the undersigned,

- acknowledge that I have read and understand the waiver and release discussed herein
- affirm that this release and waiver shall be construed broadly to provide a release
- waiver to the maximum extent permissible under applicable law.

#	Date of Visit mm/dd/yy	Name (please print)	Signature (if under 18 must be by parent or legal guardian)	Date of Birth mm/dd/yy
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
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10				
11				
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20				

LIABILITY

- We had no liability coverage. Each farm understood that they were taking a risk.
- Did require a liability waiver be signed at each farm location (not sure how well enforced that was at each location)

PROMOTIONS

Website with brochure PDF, photo slideshow, press release and where to purchase.

Georgia Mountains Farmers Network

SATURDAY, JUNE 30, 2012

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS FARM TOUR - JUNE 30 & JULY 1

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour
Saturday, June 30th
& Sunday, July 1st

NEXT GET TOGETHER

Next Get-Together - Our next two NETWORK meetings will be on Tuesday, February 19th at Ladybug Farms in Rabun County and Tuesday March 26th at Leah Lake Farms also in Rabun County. See the entries for details.

NETWORK CALENDAR

Farmers Network
JANUARY 1

PROMOTIONS



- Sent Press Releases to close to 20 newspapers, magazines and radio outlets within a 10 county area.
- Posted on Georgia Tourism website, and any other online calendar I could find.
- Sent to every e-mail list I knew existed. Probably 10 or more. Also Facebook cross postings with Chamber of Commerce, city's, etc.
- Printed 100 posters and put them everywhere – as far south as Gainesville

PROMOTIONS

- Press could come for free
- Had four articles – one front page, and one front of Lifestyle section

Farm Tour highlights local agri-, aquaculture

By ERIN LAMPER
On News Service

“I’m extremely excited to be the first ever to have a front page article on local food in the lifestyle section of the paper.”

“The tour was a success, a working proof of concept for local food in the lifestyle section of the paper.”

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LOCAL FOOD

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Tuesday, July 9, 2012

Tour

From Page 1A

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RESULTS

Sold 50 passes
Attendance was about 150

Gross income was \$1,415
Expenses were \$ 780
TOTAL INCOME \$ 633

Principal expenses were:
Artwork - \$150
Printing costs - \$350
Bumper stickers - \$100

MAJOR POTENTIAL TO BOOST INCOME THROUGH SPONSORSHIPS

Georgia Mountains Farm Tour

As a great Token of Our Appreciation we hope you'll enjoy this GIFT CERTIFICATE in one of our Local Food Markets here in the region.



To redeem simply bring this entire back page (which is an original copy) to either the Georgia Mountains Market in Canton, Ga., or to the NCJA Local Food Market in Columbus, Ga. (Columbus, Ga. only). Fill out your name, phone and e-mail below to make the certificate usable and hand it over to the Market Manager at any individual vendor.

CERTIFICATE NOT VALID WITHOUT SIGNATURE OF FARM TOUR MANAGER & YOUR SIGNATURE

We hope you enjoy your local food purchase and spread the word

YOUR NAME _____
PHONE _____
E-MAIL _____

FARM TOUR MANAGER _____
CERTIFICATE # _____

Only 7 gift certificates redeemed

FOLLOW UP SURVEY

2012 Georgia Mountains Farm Tour - SURVEY RESULTS (n=13)						
CONTACT INFO	2. How did you HEAR about the Tour (please be as specific as possible)?	3. Do you have recommendations on ways to SPREAD THE WORD for this event in the future?	4. What aspects of this year's FARM TOUR did you ENJOY THE MOST	5. What aspects of this year's FARM TOUR did you ENJOY THE LEAST?	6. Please share 3 suggestions of ways to improve the FARM TOUR next year.	7. Describe your experience with the Tour in one sentence
Linda Johnson	Justin Ellis and Chuck Mashburn	use the local internet site: Rabun Town Crier	people visiting were great the length of the tour was good not too long	the weather, Justin, can do talk to God about that for next year?? ;)	maybe a meeting of the farmers before the event really concise directions to each farm from more than one direction possibly more items for sale at the individual farm locations	very fun and informative
Joni Kennedy	you	I thought you did a great job getting the word out	I loved meeting all the people, it was such a diverse group, I actually learned a lot myself.	the weeding and the heat	1. make it a couple of weeks later to make sure we all have tomatoes and melons 2. can we do it earlier in the day so it's cooler? 3. see 2	We couldn't believe this many people would walk around the farm in 109 degrees and how kind they all were.



SurveyMonkey

FOLLOW UP SURVEY

Suggestions

- Schedule in Early June
- Concise **directions** to each farm from more than one direction
- More **items for sale** at the individual farm locations. Many farms had little or no products for sale
- Involve some **restaurants** in Clarkesville.
- Many suggestions for **earlier in the day** (but this is difficult)
- **Meal stops** before or after tour hours.

Positive Feedback

- "One of the best weekends I've had in a long time."
- "Wonderful and wholesome way to spend a weekend with our family!"
- "Great experience. Looking forward to seeing it grow and succeed in the future."
- "Informative, inspirational and Fun."

LESSONS LEARNED

- TOUR sponsored volunteer at each farm location (handle money, describe event, provide continuity) with T-shirts?
- Help farms that have never given a tour before. Some struggled a bit.
- 1-6 is five hours. Five volunteers may be better especially at busy farms so folks aren't worn out.
- Farms could have sold more onsite.

Multi-Farm Collaborations: Challenges and Rewards

Presented by Lori Sands, Silver Wheel Farm, PA



Hi, my name is Lori!

Silver Wheel Farm, LLC

www.silverwheelfarm.net

A CNG farm in Western PA



CNG Webinar Series / Multi-Farm Collaborations

Overview

Multi-Farm Collaborations: Challenges and Rewards

- There are many ways – big and small – farmers can work together to benefit themselves and their communities
- One example: NWPA Growers Cooperative
- Includes several collaborative projects, brief overview
- Your questions and discussion throughout



CNC Webinar Series - 1. Multi-Farm Collaborations

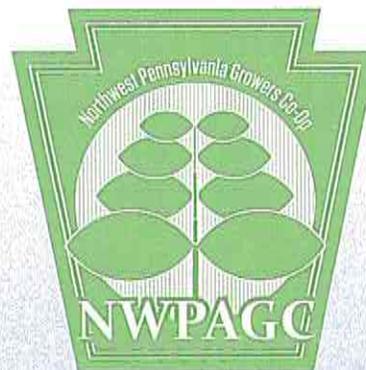
NWPA Growers Cooperative

A multi-farm CSA

16 small, family farms
4 counties

CNG/natural/organic only

www.nwpagrowers.com



Produce, berries, meats, eggs, cheeses, milk, grains, natural bodycare,
honey, maple syrup, artisan breads



CNC Webinar Series - 1. Multi-Farm Collaborations



- April 2007
 - ~ Initiated with help of grant and consultant
- 2009
 - ~ Initiated multi-farm CSA and webstore
 - ~ Sales to restaurants and schools
 - ~ Sold cooperatively at farmers' market



CNG Webinar Series - 1 Multi-farm Collaborations

Why have a Growers Cooperative?

Cooperating can reduce:

- **LABOR**
 - ~ Less packaging for bulk sales
- **TIME**
 - ~ Less time spent on the road
- **EXPENSES**
 - ~ Less gas, packaging, storage
- **ACCOUNTING**
 - ~ One invoice to the co-op replaces multiple smaller sales/invoices



CNG Webinar Series - 1 Multi-farm Collaborations

Why have a Growers Cooperative?

Cooperating can increase:

- **PURCHASING POWER**
 - ~ Group orders for seeds, potting soil, fertilizers, livestock feed

- **PRODUCT AVAILABILITY**
 - ~ Easier for co-ops/groups to access products from specialty growers i.e. winter produce, farm-raised trout, local grains

- **PRODUCT VARIETY**
 - ~ More growers means more product & more categories of product



CNG Webinar Series | Multi-Farm Collaborations

First Steps

- Find farmers who share similar markets - could be the growers you already know from farmers' markets
- Find farmers who share similar outlook or growing practices.
- Scout out members of national or regional ag groups i.e. CNG, NOFA, Farm Bureau
- Geographic proximity - scout out growers in your area and ask at the stores where you sell

- **Plan an Initial Meeting...**



CNG Webinar Series | Multi-Farm Collaborations

Be Sure to Discuss Goals

- Discuss, define and write a **clear purpose**
- Are you all on the same page?
- Will we grow? How much?
- Cap membership? Accept new growers?
- What types of products or services to include
- Think 'long range'



CNG Webinar Series | Multichem Collaborations

Structure: Formal or Informal?

- **Informal**
 - ~ share transportation
 - ~ share the responsibility
- **Formal (Agricultural Cooperative Status)**
 - ~ a legal business/tax entity which requires:
 - Organizational Agreement
 - Articles of Incorporation
 - Bylaws
 - Marketing Agreement
 - EIN



CNG Webinar Series | Multichem Collaborations

Put it in Writing

To fulfill your purpose and goals you must have written plans for:

- Marketing
- Transportation
- Recordkeeping
- Payment
- Keeping it 'legal'
- Site usage



CNG Webinar Series | Multifarm Collaborations

Who will run the show?

Models include:

- Executive Board & Manager.
- Rotation of Leadership among members
- Outside consultant hired by group or grant foundation
- Nobody - The group makes decisions by consensus.



CNG Webinar Series | Multifarm Collaborations

Board and Manager Model

Manager is paid a percentage to:

- ~ run the webstore
- ~ process CSA sign ups and payments
- ~ communicate with consumers
- ~ aggregate CSA and webstore product
- ~ collect grower invoices and give them to Treasurer
- ~ call restaurants, communicate with chefs
- ~ respond to inquiries from new growers, consumers, buyers



CNG Webinar Series | MultiFarm Collaborations

The Board Model

- The official voting body of the co-op.
- Includes: President , VP, Treasurer, Secretary At Large
- Growers vote on major decisions and expenditures:
 - ~ annual budget, new members, new procedures, changes to Bylaws.

Compensation and PUR

EITHER members are appointed to 'run' specific markets

OR

Manager is hired to run all markets

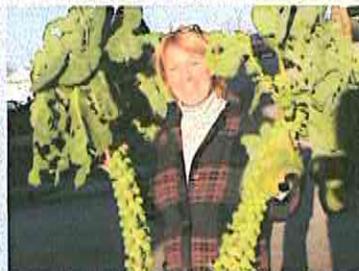
a PUR (*per unit retained*) of each sale is retained by the co-op



CNG Webinar Series | MultiFarm Collaborations

Who Will Transport?

- pay a grower or member to transport product
- rent a vehicle daily/weekly/monthly
- buy a co-op vehicle (where will you put it, who pays insurance, gas, etc?)
- pay a driver to make deliveries



CNC Webinar Series | Multi-Farm Collaborations

Who Keeps Track of Financials?

- Hire an accountant or bookkeeper
- A member serves as "Treasurer"
- A member is paid a percentage to create monthly/annual reports

It is critical to set up:

- ~ Spreadsheets
- ~ Flow Chart of responsibilities



CNC Webinar Series | Multi-Farm Collaborations

Webstore is by Small Farm Central, password protected...



www.nwpagrowers.com



CNC Webinar Series | Multistakeholder Collaborations

Potential Problems

- Storage
- Who grows what?
- Growers have too much
- Growing too big, too fast
- New Growers
- Transportation

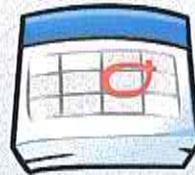


CNC Webinar Series | Multistakeholder Collaborations

Keep a Calender!

- As you progress from your first steps, keep good records of when things happen and create an annual calendar so everyone knows:

- Meeting dates
- Due dates
- Recurring bills
- CSA start and end dates



CNC Webina Series | Multibarn Collaborations

And Keep it Real!

- Behavioral Guidelines
- Pricing Policies
- Transparency
- TRUST in the system



CNC Webina Series | Multibarn Collaborations

Remember the Big Picture...

- ...when you are mired in the Multiple Molehills!
- The cooperative exists to generate income that goes to the *farmers*, not the co-op.
- The co-op also plays a role in infrastructure, education, regional connections



A happy CSA customer



CNG Webinar Series | Multibarn Collaborations

DO:

- Create transparent communication procedures with consequences for disturbing the peace
- Work with community groups to increase visibility
- Work with other cooperatives
- Get input from all members
- Provide new members with written guidelines



CNG Webinar Series | Multibarn Collaborations

DON'T:

- Place too much responsibility on one person or the same small group.
- Allow one person's beliefs or opinions to influence decisions.
- Become closed to new ideas or opportunities.
- Become dependent upon the services provided by start-up grant money.



CNG Webinar Series | Multitask Collaborations

Finally...

Cooperating in business, much like marriage, is hard work that requires excellent communication skills, willingness to share money, goods and ideas, and tolerance for the 'other' in general



CNG Webinar Series | Multitask Collaborations

The benefits are well worth the time and energy spent because:

Everyone Wins!

The grower wins

The consumer wins

The local economy wins

The community wins



Liability Insurance for Farmers Cooperatives



Presented by Butch Tolley, Clover Wreath Farm, TN



Beginnings...

- Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers began in 2010 with a generous grant from Gaining Ground in Chattanooga TN.
- Our goal to put more local food on the plates of those in the Chattanooga Area.
- First project was to open Whole Foods Market to farmers.



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Chattanooga Sustainable Farmers

- A group of 30 farms working together to create new opportunities for farmers to grow and sell more produce in the Chattanooga Area

- Monthly Educational opportunities
- Relationships with local retailers and restaurants
- Networking opportunities
- Monthly Newsletter
- Membership dues



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Our Future Plans

- Continue to find new markets for our farmers
- Continue to serve area farmers with:
 - educational classes
 - networking opportunities
 - newsletters
 - farm tours



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Do I Need Liability Insurance?

Yes! If you want to sell to....

- Grocery
- Restaurant
- Institution



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

What Level of Coverage Do I Need?

- Different products require different levels of coverage
- For most produce a \$1 Million policy is all that is needed. Examples – head lettuce, squash, tomatoes, etc
- For “ready to eat” products a \$5 Million policy is required. Examples – cut spinach, salad mix, cut broccoli, sprouts, microgreens, etc.



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

What is Covered?



- Your farm is covered at locations where the relationship is set up with the group
- Anything sold through the group



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance



What is NOT Covered?

- On farm sales
- Most farmers markets
- U-Pick
- Any sale where the group is not included



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Whole Foods

- Setting up the account takes a little over a month.
- Once in the system you can sell at any Whole Foods
- Farmer sells the produce and delivers to Whole Foods
- Group Invoicing
- The group is paid and reimburses the farmer
- Certified Naturally Grown products are treated as “conventional”



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Invoicing

- Each farm receives a bank of invoice numbers to be used for each order delivered to Whole Foods
- A generic invoice is used with the group information on it



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

CSF Policy with Cotton States



- \$1 Million policy
- Includes a rider for health benefits
- The policy disperses up to \$5,000 per person for medical bills to anyone effected by the produce. This is before the policy is touched.



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Things to Consider

- The fall and winter time is a good time to start talking about establishing a coop.
- You will need to have one point person to set up the relationships with retailers/institutions
- A good idea to have a tour of the facility with the farmers. This enables farmers to meet the receiving person and clearly understand what they are to do on delivery day.



CNG Webinar Series | Liability Insurance

Thank You!

[butch@chattanoogasustainablefarmers.org](mailto:butch@chattanooga sustainable farmers.org)

www.chattanoogasustainablefarmers.org

