

Final Report

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Division of Agriculture (RIDAG)

2006 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

12-25-G-0538

CONTACT

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Consumers Awareness

Buy local and horticulture promotions:

Farm Bureau

Title: Radio Public Relations Campaign/ RI Farm Bureau

Summary: We felt a radio ad campaign would be the most efficient way to create demand by the Rhode Island Public for RI Grown Specialty Crops. These ads were necessary to stimulate the production of RI Grown Specialty crops to enhance Agriculture in Rhode Island.

Working with the Rhode Island Farm Bureau the RIDAG funded a grant initiative to develop a BUY LOCAL radio advertising campaign. Over 100 ads were aired over a 2-season period. The ads ask Rhode Island residents to support their local farmers by buying specialty crops at local roadside stands and farmer's markets and nurseries.

Approach: The RI Farm Bureau broadcast over 100/30 second ads during the months of May through October for two seasons. Over 200,000 people heard these ads on local radio stations WPRO-AM, WWLI-FM, AND WPRV-AM. During the grant project these ads were produced by Al. Bettencourt who contracted with Citadel Communications to produce the ads. The ads were aired over a two year period on the above listed radio stations.

The ads were well received by the Rhode Island Public. We know this because of the feedback received by farmers at their farms and the increase in Farm Bureau web site visits after the ads were aired. Farmers did an informal survey of customers by asking them if they had heard the ads.

These grant funds were used to create the radio promotion campaign for Specialty Crops. Subsequent Grant funds will be used to further expand the program for an additional two years

Goals: Our goal to increase the awareness of the public about the value of supporting Specialty Crop Farmers has been realized. We have reached our goal of educating the RI Public about the availability of Fruit and Vegetables at Farmers Market and Roadside Stands. We know this because we have seen increased numbers of people at farmers' markets when the ads were aired. We did this by surveying customers and asking them how they heard about the farmers markets. Many first time shoppers said they heard the ads on the radio. We have also seen an increase in the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. The best indicator of the programs success is that Agriculture is the only part of the Rhode Island Economy that is growing. Our efforts to educate the public is showing a great return.

Outcomes: Farmers have reported an increase of the public's awareness of their products and increased sales of approx. 10%. Also we have seen that even in this difficult economy the only part of the RI Economy that has shown

growth is Agriculture. The baseline data used was previous week sales when ads were not run compared to sales of weeks when ads were run. Through these efforts we asked farmers for a percentage of increase from previous sales; however, we did not ask for actual sales figures in dollars.

Beneficiaries: The radio ads have been well received by the Rhode Island General Public. We have received positive feed back at farmers markets and roadside stands through our informal surveys. Rhode Island Specialty Crop Farmers have benefited from increased sales. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers.

Lessons Learned: We have learned that educating the public through radio is an effective way to get the word out about supporting Specialty Crop Agriculture. We know this because we have seen increased sales of Specialty Crops at Farmers Markets and Roadside Stands. When new customers asked what brought you to the farmers market many said they heard the radio ads.

Contact for this project: Alfred R. Bettencourt Jr. Executive Director Farm Bureau. Tel. 401-647-3570; e-mail albettjr@aol.com

RINLA

Title: Upgrade and expand the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association website

Summary: Working with the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association (RINLA) the RIDAG funded a grant initiative to Upgrade and expand the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association (RINLA) website (www.rinla.org) to increase public use, awareness of specialty crops grown in RI, professionals. This project was leveraged by RINLA funds and URI in-kind efforts.

Approach: This project upgraded and expanded the RINLA website (www.rinla.org) to increase public use, awareness of specialty crop production in RI, and to increased member benefits. The original website was created in 2001-3 with funding from a RIDEM Farm Viability grant. The database and pages, which were created at that time, have failed their intended purpose for a variety of reasons. The web site, was 5 years old, and needed to be overhauled and updated. As well, a fortunate collaboration has developed between RINLA and two academic departments at the University of Rhode Island. This collaboration allowed for a complete redesign of the site with the addition of powerful tools to search for members and services, as well as promoting the production and availability of specialty nursery and floriculture crops in Rhode Island. Because of the Cooperative Extension (CE)

mission of URI, these improvements to the site were completed at a fraction of the cost needed for a professional design by a private web services firm. Furthermore, many specialty crop growers in Rhode Island do not have websites (because of the cost). Funding from this grant was used to support the development of websites for specialty crop producers that are linked to the RINLA.ORG website and a stock locator that was developed. This will give greater visibility and greater use of Rhode Islands Specialty crops.

A complete redesign of the RINLA Home Page, including the addition of a variety of resource links and information on the RI Green Industry, the RINLA mission, and the RI Certified Horticulturist Program. Also, the project funded the redesign and testing of the member locator for both the member and public side web-pages. It also expanded other database elements to increase the dynamic and functional aspect of the website in ways that increase the value of the site to the public and to the RINLA membership. Creation of individual websites for Rhode Island growers of specialty nursery crops including real time linkage to the stock locator on the RINLA.ORG site. www.rinla.org

Goals: *The goal of this project to create an interactive web-based resource which will tie the public to RINLA member services and RI specialty (nursery) crop producers has been achieved. The newly developed databases, stock lists, and professional service locators will enhance public awareness and use of horticulture services and plant materials produced in Rhode Island.*

Outcomes: *Site hits have increased to over 12,000 per month to the RINLA website up from 6000. This was tracked by the number of visits to the website that was monitored by the web-master. Farmers and website users have contacted us to tell us user friendly and easy to navigate the updated web-page is. 1) Feedback from both public and member users of RINLA.ORG has been positive as reflected in the increased hits to the website. 2) Member farms report having increased sales of specialty crop nursery and floriculture crops. This increase was measured by comparing sales prior to the web-site upgrade to figures of present sales. These sales figures were confirmed from informal conversations with Farmers. We did not ask farmers to give us actual sales figures. Farmers were asked as a percentage did sales increase after system was upgraded. Farmers told us they had new customers coming in after the upgrade. Also an additional 12 Restaurants began purchasing fruit and vegetables direct from RI farmers.*

Beneficiaries: *Up to 25,000 public consumers, 350 RINLA member companies, and 10-15 staff and faculty at URI have benefited from the updated RINLA website and use the tools available everyday. These groups benefit from the upgraded system because of the ease of navigation and the ability to link and find product easily; thus increasing sales for RI Specialty Crop Farmers. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to*

sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers. As time goes on and monitoring of hits on the web-page will show how beneficial this upgrade is to RI Nursery Growers Association members and the general public.

Lessons Learned: *We have learned that educating the public through an updated website and making it user friendly increases sales and helps support Specialty Crop Agriculture. We know this from our informal interviews with RI Nurserymen who have told us they have seen an increase in traffic at their store locations. Also they have seen an increase in demand for their services.*

Contact for this project: *Joseph J. Majeika. Treasurer RINLA.
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RICAPE

Title: *Develop a series of training and development programs for Specialty Crop Farmers interested or engaged in agri-tourism*

Summary: *Working with The Rhode Island Center for Agriculture Promotion & Education (RICAPE) the RIDAG funded a grant initiative to develop a series of training and professional development programs for specialty crop farmers interested or engaged in agri-tourism and/or alternative enterprises, and to conduct two marketing initiatives to promote Rhode island's farms including: a rack card for travel, tourism and visitor centers, and customization and upgrades to the www.rifarmways.org website. The impetus of this program was to sustain agriculture in Rhode Island by increasing agri-tourism. By bringing consumers to the farms through farm promotions etc. consumption of Specialty Crops (Fruit and Vegetables) was increased. Through our efforts, traffic at area farms was increased over previous years. Farmers have reported an increase of an average of 10 new customers a week. Fruit and Vegetable farmers offering pick your own were surveyed. Farmers believe by holding special events at their farms has increased sales for them.*

Approach: *The approach of this project was to expand training and professional services to specialty crop farmers seeking to develop on-farm enterprises products, activities and amenities. Two training workshops were held in 3/2007 and 3/2008. Also to expand the marketing of specialty crop farm sites to visitors, tourists, professionals and others seeking on-farm cultural, educational, historical and recreational experiences. These workshops have given Fruit and Vegetable farmers insight and training on topics ranging from the general principles and current trends in agricultural tourism, to marketing planning tourism development, hospitality training, education programs, alternative energy and waste systems. Growers Associations. Participant response to the training was good. Forty of the*

participants requested on farm visits to enhance their fruit and vegetable farms for agri-tourism visits. The trainings lasted two hours and were attended by 50 Fruit and Vegetable Growers. Also as part of the training 30 on farm visits were also scheduled. The trainings were held in Providence and North Kingstown. Notice of the trainings was done through e-mail, web page, and print media through the RI Fruit and Vegetable.

The marketing initiatives to expand training and professional services to farmers seeking to develop on farm enterprises products, activities and amenities was a integrated part of the training. Also the expansion of farm sites to visitors, tourists, professionals and others seeking on-farm cultural, educational, historical and recreational experiences was covered in the training. The upgrades of the website now allow easy navigation and has much more information available. www.rifarmways.org

Goals: The goal of this project is to increase the education, training and ability of farmers to develop on-farm delivery of new enterprises and amenities that will attract visitors and increase on farm revenues has been realized. Specialty Crop Farmers have expanded the scope and reach of the marketing of their farms as destinations of cultural, ecological, historical and recreational significance.

Outcomes: Twenty Rhode Island's farms have expanded their menu of activities and amenities available for visitors for the agri-tourism season (June-Christmas). Over 50 Specialty Crop Farmers were trained at the two workshops. The RIEDC (RI Economic Development Corporation) office of tourism promoted RI's farms at two national tourism conventions including the National Travel Association, and the American Bus Association, and that there will be growing local, regional and national interest in Rhode Island's Specialty Crop Farms. These events were attended by many industry representatives.

Beneficiaries: Rhode Island Specialty Crop Farmers have benefited from increased sales. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers. Over 50 fruit and vegetable growers benefited from the training. This is quantified by the increase traffic of new customers to their farms by embracing agri-tourism by holding special events at their farms. The number of citizens that benefit from the updated web-site is being tracked by visits to the site. We expect as many as 15,000 people will benefit from visiting the site.

Lessons Learned: We have learned that agri-tourism is an effective way to bring potential customers out to your farm thus increasing sales. We know the workshops have benefited fruit and vegetable growers by the feedback they have given us that they see an average of 10 new customers a week at their farms. This increase in customers is due to holding special events at their farms. This method of marketing their farms was learned at the training.

Contact for this project: Stu Nunnery, Director RICAPE.
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New Marketing Opportunities:

Kids First

Title: *The Further development of a statewide Farm to School program, increasing the amount of locally grown, fresh produce offered in Rhode Island Schools*

Summary: *The impetus behind this project is to promote the use of fresh local produce in all of our school districts. The Kids First Farm to School Program is creating a new school market that will play a major role in developing the capacity of the local produce growers to supply a stable and predictable demand for large volumes of produce. This is necessary for the viability of RI farms and to improve the nutrition of our youth through increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals.*

Working with the community based Kids First group the RIDAG funded a grant initiative that further developed a statewide Farm to School Program. This program increased the amount of locally grown, fresh produce that is offered in RI schools by developing purchasing relationships between school food service providers and RI producers/farmers. The use of RI grown produce in school cafeterias enhanced the competitiveness of RI specialty crops, particularly fruits and vegetables.

Approach: *The approach of this project was to improve the nutrition of RI youth through increased consumption of local fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals. Our Farm to School Program is created a new "school market" that played a major role in developing the capacity of the local agricultural economy by providing a stable and predictable demand for large volumes of produce.*

Evidence of our success to date, and our potential for expansion, is found in our intensified pilot Farm to School Program created in collaboration with Chartwells food Service Management Company launched in September 2006. This pilot program in 6 RI school districts, has been so successful that the national corporate office just approved expansion to all 13 of the school districts under its management in RI. Our preliminary data shows the following amounts of fresh RI produce served in schools during two months, September thru October: 544 cases of apples; 500 Dozens of corn; 117 cases of tomatoes; 500 lbs of potatoes; and 1,550 pounds of butternut squash. In addition, Aramark reported to us an additional 4,200 pounds of local produce purchased for its accounts in RI. With this type of positive response to our intensified efforts, and in combination with our efforts in other

schools, we feel very secure about a rapid expansion of the farm to school market in RI.

Kids First, in partnership with the statewide RI Farm to School Committee, (membership includes RI DEM Director Ken Ayars and Kids First Executive Director, Dorothy Brayley, University of RI GAP program instructors, along with representatives from RI Departments of Health and Education, the farm community and RI school food service) hired/support a RI Farm to School Project Coordinator, Rafi Minkin, who was responsible for implementing and overseeing the accomplishment of Grant Goals and Objectives. RI Farm to School Coordinator reported to and received input from the RI Farm to School Committee throughout the grant period. The Coordinator organized and conducted meetings as well as met individually with farmers, school food service directors, produce distributors and other parties necessary to facilitate the development of Farm to School purchasing relationships. The Coordinator acted as convener, facilitator, and provider of technical assistance to foster the RI Farm to School purchasing relationships that benefited both the farmers and school food service operations.

Goals: *Oversight of the Farm to school program is achieved through regular meetings and communications fostered by Kids First between all collaborative partners including the RIDEM, farm Fresh RI, RI Department of Health, Kids First, Chartwells, and others. At a minimum, the Farm to School Advisory Committee meets monthly with regular updates weekly by e-mail. Immediate oversight is provided by Dorothy Brayley, Executive Director of Kids First. All 35 RI school districts purchase at least one RI grown product by the Fall of 2008. Thanks to this grant the work of Kids First has resulted in 30 of RI's 35 school districts purchasing RI Grown Specialty Crops at least once from the 2007 harvest. We will continue to work to get all districts on board and increase purchases by each district.*

Outcomes: 1 *The Farm to School Program with Chartwells, ARAMARK and Sodexo, has lead to 30 of 35 school districts purchasing at least one RI Grown Specialty Crop in 2007 and 2008 harvest season. Prior to the program no supplier had contracts to purchase RI Grown Fruits and Vegetables. We have had a substantial increase in the purchase of RI Grown Fruits and Vegetables for RI Schools. The product being purchased the most is apples. Since the food service providers seek out smaller apples this gives our growers a market for apples that would not be sold.*

2 - *A new "school bulk" pricing structure for specialty crops continues to be investigated, quantified and promoted.*

Beneficiaries: *Rhode Island Specialty Crop Farmers have benefited from increased sales. The school children of Rhode Island have benefited by having fresh RI Grown Specialty Crops available to them. This will be very beneficial to eating healthy.*

According to a recent report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), Rhode Island served approximately 83,771 school lunches and an additional 25,093 school breakfasts during the academic year. By promoting the use of fresh local produce in all of our school districts, our Farm to School Program is creating a new school market that will play a major role in developing the capacity of the local fruit and vegetable economy by providing a stable and predictable demand for large volumes of produce thus enhancing specialty crops in RI. By creating more demand for product we can help agriculture grow in RI.

Lessons Learned: We have learned that creating partnerships with different Specialty Crop suppliers to schools has created a steady sales stream for RI Specialty Crop farmers. We have also learned that the more you educate the children about eating healthy the more demand for these Specialty Crops increase.

In surveying farmers we see an approximate 10% increase in sales over previous years when the program was not in effect. Also the effect on the children for eating healthy will be seen in the future. We have seen soda and candy machines being taken out of schools being replaced with healthy snacks for sales such as apples.

Contact for this project: Dorothy Brayley, Director Kids First
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Farm Fresh

Title: Enhancing the Online RI farm Database

Summary: Working with Farm Fresh Rhode Island a Brown University based community group the RIDAG will fund a grant initiative aimed to ensure the accuracy and breadth of the information in the online RI farm database www.farmfreshri.org by getting current specialty crop farm data from more RI farms. It will also enhance the information available now by surveying farms' delivery routes for buyers and simplifying the site's design to maximize clarity. The impetus behind the development of this project was to create a website that is a comprehensive database of RI Farms, indexed by foods grown, season and how to buy each farm's food. The website reduces the upfront costs of finding local foods and has created countless new relationships between farmers and buyers in the short time it has been in place.

It was critical to have accurate information on the website to increase the market share of locally grown Specialty Crops to keep farming in RI viable. By making it easy for retail establishments and restaurants to purchase RI Grown fruit and vegetables online.

Approach: The purpose of this project was to improve the www.farmfreshri.org specialty crop farm database, which is a public resource

that promotes the purchase of locally grown foods in Rhode Island. Communicating the farm and food information as clearly as possible will streamline local food sales. The website has so far generated dozens of new business-to-business purchasing relationships with local farms, provided key information for journalists bringing media attention to RI farms, and given hundreds of Rhode Islanders the tools to buy fresh foods directly from the farms that dot their home state's landscape. Furthermore, it enables buyers to increase demand for local foods from suppliers further up the purchasing chain with the result of opening up larger markets to RI foods. The local purchasing relationships that result are more direct and financially viable for farmers. Each month during the summer of 2007, there were 30,000 unique visitors to the website. Specific farm, food and market pages were viewed 80,000 times.

The website enables regular updates by farmers that benefit buyers, researchers and over 10,000 citizens in Rhode Island that visit this webpage. In the past year, 61 farmers have updated their own farm information. Thirty-two new RI fruit and vegetable farms have been added to the database, 153 farms have been updated, and 7 inactive farms have been removed. Outreach to farmers will increase these numbers and even further strengthen the accuracy of the database.

Goals:

To enhance the comprehensiveness, accessibility and accuracy of the www.farmfreshri.org on line farm database. To streamline connections between buyers and Rhode Islander farmers has been accomplished.

Outcomes: 100 farmers sign up for new accounts. 200 farms have updated information. Over 40,000 unique visitors to the site each summer month. 25 delivery routes added to the site. Sales of Specialty Crops to area restaurants has increased over 10%. The only segment of the Rhode Island economy that is growing is agriculture. This information was gathered through farmers surveys and monitoring how many visitors to the website. This data has shown increased sales over previous years.

Beneficiaries: Rhode Island Fruit and Vegetable Farmers have benefited from increased sales. There are over 100 fruit and vegetable farmers listed on the web page. Also farmers are added and removed regularly. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Fruit and Vegetable Crop Farmers. Also farmers benefit by having an updated user friendly web-site that is easily available to the public to purchase specialty crop items.

Lessons Learned: We have learned that the computer is a very effective way to market Specialty Crops. By updating and maintaining the web-page we have linked specialty crop farmers to their customers. This has increased sales for Fruit and Vegetable Farmers in Rhode Island. Through a survey of

fruit and vegetable growers, we know that our efforts have increased sales. Also on a macro scale the only segment of the Rhode Island economy that has grown in the last year is agriculture.

Contact for this project: Noah Fulmer, Director Farm Fresh RI.
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Rhode Island Division of Agriculture

Title: Enhance Specialty Crops Sales in Rhode Island

Summary: The purpose of this project was to increase the market share of locally grown specialty crops by expanding local growers' customers' bases and incorporating new and alternative marketing techniques and strategies with emphasis on educating consumers on the benefits of purchasing locally grown specialty crops. The impetus behind the development of this project was to give Specialty Crop Farmers (Fruit and Vegetable & Nursery Crops) increased sales. This was done through our marketing efforts. It was necessary to increase the market share of locally grown Specialty Crops to keep farming in Rhode Island viable.

Approach: The Rhode Island Division of Agriculture worked with specialty crop growers throughout the state to expand on its "Rhode Island Grown Take Some Home" buy local initiative by conducting produce preparation demonstrations featuring local celebrity chefs at all RI farmers market and participating roadside stands. The Division also updated its RI Agricultural Guide publication, a complete guide to specialty crop operations in the state. The division also used grant funds to continue marketing projects with Harvest New England which is a multi-state project consisting of the six New England States in a joint effort to capitalize on the local grown effort into the retail trade, namely the large supermarket chains operating throughout the New England region. The Harvest New England project that was worked on was to hold seminars for Specialty Crop Farmers at the Harvest New England conference in Sturbridge CT. In February of 2009. We are working on plans for holding another conference in 2011. Over 200 Specialty Crop Farmers attended the conference.

The Division also used SCGF to enhance its nursery inspection program by incorporating new training and two seasonal employees to facilitate a more streamlined inspection process of nursery stock to allow for quicker delivery to out of state locations. Also the division enhanced its' good agricultural practice (GAP) program by providing on site training to specialty crop producers requesting the service to enhance the marketability of RI grown nursery and produce throughout the region. The site training were held at 18 farms. Advertising for the trainings were done through our e-mail system to

Specialty Crop Farmers and interested parties. Also the Farm Bureau newsletter was used.

Goals: *Our goals to increase the awareness of the public about the value of supporting Specialty Crop Farmers has been realized. The only part of the Rhode Island Economy that is growing is Agriculture. Our efforts to educate the public is showing a great return.*

Outcomes: *Farmers have reported an increase of the public's awareness of their products and increased sales of approx. 10% from the previous years. Also we have seen that even in this difficult economy the only part of the RI Economy that has shown growth is Agriculture. This was measured by surveying fruit and vegetable farmers to see if there was any increase in sales from previous years when this program was not in place.*

*We also: Printed 20,000 New RI Agricultural Guides
Conducted 20 Cooking Demonstrations at Farmers Markets
Inspect 150 Nurseries for out of state shipments
Certified 25 farms for GAP compliance for sales to school districts*

Beneficiaries: *Over 150 Rhode Island Specialty Crop Farmers have benefited from increased sales. Over 20,000 RI residents benefited from keeping their quality of live by having RI Specialty Crop farmers still farming. We have distributed over 20,000 agricultural guides to the public. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers and helping to stop overdevelopment of farmland.*

Lessons Learned: *We have learned that educating the public through media, brochures and cooking demos has created increased demand for Specialty Crops. This was evident by the increase in sales experienced by our farmers over the period of the Specialty Crop Grant. Surveys of specialty crop farmers show us they have realized increased sales. Also the increase in the pedestrian traffic at farmers markets has increased dramatically. We now have over 40 farmers markets in Rhode Island. Three years ago we had 18. Consumer demand for RI Grown Specialty Crops grows every year. The Specialty Crop program is critical to help get the word out about supporting Specialty Crop Agriculture in Rhode Island.*

Contact for this project: *Peter Susi Supervisor Marketing and Promotion Section Tel. 401-222-2781 x4517; e-mail peter.susi@dem.ri.gov*

Research & Development

University of Rhode Island Research Office

Title: *To install field trials of new squash varieties that will be marketable to the ethnically diverse clientele of urban farmers markets.*

Summary:

The impetus behind the development of this project was to fund a grant initiative to install field trials of new squash varieties that will be marketable to the ethnically diverse clientele of urban farmer's markets. Forty-six percent of RI farmer's markets are in urban areas including Providence, East Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket and Woonsocket. These urban areas are also home to ninety-eight percent of RI's largest minority population.

These field trials were needed to afford farmers an opportunity to observe sustainable production practices of new winter squash varieties and others that are not traditionally grown in our state. Production data was collected and shared with farmers at a twilight meeting in the fall of 2007.

Approach:

In 2007, the College of the Environment and Life Sciences at URI (CELS) installed field trials of six types of winter squash grown under a perimeter trap crop (PTC) procedure. Squash varieties were selected on the basis of disease resistance, fruit size (smaller varieties were selected to appeal to small families), and cultural diversity (to appeal to the ethnically diverse clientele of urban farmers' markets). The varieties chosen were White Clout (a white acorn squash), Betternut 401 (a powdery-mildew resistant butternut squash), La Estrella (a calabaza, Baby Blue Hubbard (a small hubbard squash), Eclipse (a bettercup squash), and Sun spot (a buttercup squash hybrid).

On June 8, 2007, CELS students and staff direct-seeded the squash on 2.5 acres at URI's agronomy field. In accord with PCT (a well-documented sustainable cropping technique), the Baby Blue Hubbards were planted around the perimeter of the field to attract cucumber beetles and minimize pesticide applications. A pre-emergent herbicide was applied immediately after planting.

Two weeks after planting, the first cucumber beetle appeared. An insecticide was applied to the PTC. Three days later, a breach occurred in the trap crop. The remainder of the crop was then treated with an insecticide as well. Ten days later, scouting indicated the need for another insecticide application. Fungicides were applied throughout the season according to current cucurbit-growing practices.

Goals: *RI Small-Scale Farms Technical Support Project Manager, Kristen Dame, joined URI's Marion Gold on an NBC 10 Plant Pro segment to highlight PTC and publicize the forthcoming Vegetable Twilight Meeting. The*

piece aired on Saturday, September 1 and Wednesday, September 5. URI hosted a Vegetable Twilight Meeting (VTM) on September 13 for Rhode Island's commercial vegetable growers highlighting the selected squash varieties and the PTC technique. Guest speakers Ruth Hazzard (UMASS) and Jude Boucher (UCONN) discussed integrated pest management in cucurbits and brassicas. The event's print program included the growing practices utilized in the plot, a project evaluation, directions for implementing PTC, and a project expense summary. Forty-Five individuals attended the VTM, over half of whom were commercial growers. Also represented were members of the Rhode Island's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Department of Environmental Management, UCONN and UMASS Cooperative Extensions, and URI students/faculty.

On September 22, CELS staff, URI 101 students, URI Master Gardeners, and RI Community Food Bank employees harvested the squash.

Outcomes:

Commercial vegetable growers were introduced to six varieties of winter squash that exhibit disease resistance and/or appeal to ethnically diverse markets.

Rhode Island growers were exposed to under-utilized sustainable cropping techniques (PTC) via television and an on-site grower meeting.

Twenty-nine RI growers' connections with state and regional agricultural service providers were strengthened through interactions at 2 well-attended Vegetable Twilight Meetings.

Using sustainable cropping techniques, CELS staff produced 46,832 pounds of squash to be distributed to needy families in Rhode Island via the RI Community Food Bank.

A second Vegetable Twilight Meeting was held at the URI Agronomy fields on August 18, 2008. Jude Boucher from UCONN shared information on Reduced Tillage and PTC; Rebecca Brown (URI Plant Sciences) gave the results of her tomato work; Kristen Dame explained the variety trials. Thirty-Two Farmers attended the meeting.

The farmers that attended the meetings were surveyed and rated the average usefulness of the meeting a "4" (on a 1-5 scale with "5" being "very useful") It is obvious the farmers felt the meeting was very beneficial to them based on the survey.

Beneficiaries: The Rhode Island Specialty Crop squash growers have benefited from increased sales and knowledge. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers. Thirty farmers that attended the meetings and

learned by using perimeter trap crops they can lessen the amount of pesticide that is needed to be sprayed. In surveying farmers we found that they will be able to control insects much more economically because of using fewer pesticides. We will see the evidence of this in later years as these methods of growing crops are used in the future.

Lessons Learned: *We have learned that educating farmers through Twilight Meetings helps them increase sales and production of Specialty Crops. We know that farmers by using these growing methods will save money on less pesticide applications. Also these growing methods will increase crop yield when introduced on farm. The true benefits will be realized in the future. The University Field trials proved beneficial growing methods in a controlled environment.*

-19 out of 29 respondents (65.5%) had a first-time exposure to PTC at the meeting

-19 out of 29 respondents (65.5%) intended to use/recommend PTC in the future

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Trails End Farm

Title: *Increased Yields through better pollination*

Summary:

The RIDAG funded a grant initiative with Trails End Farm to study increased specialty crop yields through the use of local bee colonies by investigating the feasibility of using a modified greenhouse as an apiary house to over-winter and propagate bee colonies in New England. Availability of local bees has been on the decline for several years as such local growers have experienced difficulty in locating bees at their farms for pollination purposes. In many cases yields of some native specialty crops have suffered. This project is an effort to reverse this downward trend and increase yields through alternative means.

Approach: *The approach of this project is to investigate the possibility of increasing local specialty crop yields through increased pollination by increasing the number of hives available for use by local growers. To achieve this the process will be to demonstrate that by keeping colonies in a controlled environment, where access to the interior of the hive is available and applying the necessary interventions and that it is possible, even over winter, to produce strong colonies with lots of brood and young bees.*

Results of this project were made available to all apiary owners via website postings, and workshop held with local and regional apiary owners.

Goals: *While a key objective of the program was not met during the reporting period (greenhouse erection) , the infrastructure is in place to reach this objective quickly by the end of the 2009 season. The propagating portion of the program continues to move forward. We have addressed a number of apiary and garden organizations during the year and have seen the program publicized on television and print media. The goal of this project to study the possibility of increasing the availability of bees for pollination via an overwintering process which would deliver a positive effect on specialty crop yields without increasing chemical needs. Over a 100 apiaries have been recruited to take part in the study.*

Outcomes: *This project has generated a lot of new ideas as far as the propagating aspect, and we recognize the need for rearing mated queens early in the season. We are working on techniques to handle the demand. The next step once we prove our overwintering and propagating project will be to produce artificially inseminated queens so that fertile queens are available in April or May. This way, we can split the heavily populated colonies that we overwintered.*

This information was shared with the Bristol, Beekeepers Association in Dighton, Massachusetts. Over 100 Beekeepers were present. On January 9, 2008, we were invited to Portsmouth, RI to speak and give a PowerPoint presentation to the Portsmouth Garden Club. Over 60 people were in attendance.

Beneficiaries: *Rhode Island Specialty Crop Farmers have benefited from increased sales of. The residents of Rhode Island have benefited by helping to sustain their quality of life by supporting Specialty Crop Farmers. Increase pollination is critical to the sustainability of a Specialty Crop Industry in the State of RI. Over 200 Fruit and Vegetables Growers benefited from increased bee populations. Over 60 beekeepers benefited by having their bees overwinter with a lower mortality rate and improved health.*

Lessons Learned: *We recognized something had to be done to overwinter bees with a lower mortality rate and improve their health. A disaster hit beekeepers this year in the form of Disappearing Disease and Colony Collapse Disorder. These problems made national headlines and were front-page news across the country. This project has generated a lot of new ideas as far as the propagating aspect, and we recognize the need for rearing mated queens early in the season. We are working on techniques to handle the demand. The 10 frame configuration takes up too much production space and is inefficient. Room will be made for queen rearing and artificial insemination.*

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