

Market Longhorn Beef through Local Farmers Markets

Texas Longhorn Cooperative of Rice, TX received \$39,870 to improve and promote the sale of grass-fed, longhorn beef at farmers markets through an organized marketing campaign and a more efficient transportation system. Funds were used to purchase promotional materials, labeling, a used refrigerated truck, and a laptop computer; and pay for participation at four Texas farmers markets.

Final Report



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To: 2008 FMPP Grant Team
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Subject: Final report

Project Summary

To improve and promote the sale of grass-fed, lean, longhorn beef at farmers markets through an organized marketing campaign and a more efficient transportation system.

Issues and Approaches

The main issues that came up during the FMPP grant period was limited funds to pay for additional employees. TLC received funds for a project manager, but not for other employees. To overcome this, the co-op pulled in its members to volunteer to work farmers markets, help with processing and packaging, bookkeeping and record keeping and transporting meat. This worked well in the beginning of the project, but soon volunteers would not show up or not even volunteer. We had 3 volunteers we could rely on consistently. The Project Manager was working constantly and hardly able to keep up with the demand of beef at the various farmers markets we were attending. Towards the end of the project it was decided that the co-op would give a commission to the 'volunteers' to entice them to show up. TLC sold beef at a retail price but gave the difference of wholesale and retail to the volunteer for compensation of their time and also encouraged them to actively sell the product instead of just 'sitting' there. This was

another issue that came up. Some volunteers just didn't have the outgoing personality needed to be in a farmers market. They soon were weeded out.

Another issue that also pertains to not enough manpower; as sales and our name spread around the Dallas/Fort Worth area, our internet sales spiked! It was quite a challenge to keep up with shipping orders, finding dry ice to ship, keeping shipping prices low and ensuring enough meat was kept at the office to cover these shipments. To overcome these issues, the project manager just did what he could to keep up and communicate well with the customers so they knew to expect a delayed, if that was the case.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved

TLC feels very fortunate to have received this grant. TLC earned \$30,000 for its members through selling meat at farmers markets and online. TLC also received 20 more memberships from longhorn breeders. This is a testament that the co-op's reputation is spreading throughout the breeding community, and also shows that longhorn breeders are in desperate need of a different venue to sell their animals.

Our biggest goal and outcome achieved is the overwhelming demand from consumers for longhorn beef. There was lots of criticism from the breeding community that longhorn is too tough, too lean, nobody will want it. But it has proven to be untrue. Consumers want a healthy beef, they want to go back to the original, American beef animal and support local ranchers. Longhorn meat cooks differently. Educating the consumer on how to cook longhorn is extremely important for customers to be happy with longhorn beef. TLC's project manager took this very seriously and all the work of taking the time with the customer paid off. Consumers love the product, are willing to change their ways of cooking and thinking about beef.

Beneficiaries

Longhorn Breeders – This is the first group that is a beneficiary of this grant. These longhorn breeders are mostly low – middle class ranchers looking for a way to keep breeding the animals they love while also staying in an agricultural profession to keep working and living in rural America. A lot of these breeders and their families have been raising longhorns since the 50s when the longhorn became nearly extinct. But unfortunately, we are repeating history with a dwindling profit window in raising longhorns. In speaking with longhorn breeders, there are many breeders leaving this breed of cattle for another due to not being able to make any money and there are not many breeders taking their place. Our members have a renewed love for the animals, they are able to see that the longhorn has a place with American beef eaters, that there is a way to market your own animals, and that you can make a profit! You have to work a little harder for it, but it is worth it to make \$1200/per animal instead of \$200.

Consumers – TLC's group of consumers have a wide range on all levels. They are low income to wealthy, overweight and fit, white collar and blue collar. The overwhelming thing that ties these people together is the fact that they are becoming more aware of what they are eating and buying. They want a healthier diet, they are aware of how animals are raised for processing, they want to support local ranchers instead of multi-national conglomerates. TLC is lucky that the consumer base that has been built over the FMPP grant funding period is extremely loyal and dedicated to all the above mentioned points.

This grant has offered the longhorn community a peek into the unbelievably vast possibilities the longhorn cattle breed has to offer both consumers and breeders. The grant not only shows this to longhorn breeders – but to all cattle breeders. Ranchers can raise and market their own animals and receive the profits from all their hard work. It is time that breeders set their price as the market sets it, not how the beef industry wants it. The beef industry has been setting the price so low for breeders for so long, that it is becoming harder and harder to edge out a living, especially now that the world market has opened up and South American beef is being imported into the country. TLC has been receiving calls from ranchers who raise Herefords, Angus, etc who want ways to sell their own beef and want information. TLC only serves the longhorn community, but we have been more than happy to help these ranchers find a way to set something up for their own cattle community.

Lessons Learned

The main lesson learned is to not depend too much on a volunteer workforce. If we do not have the manpower to depend on, TLC should not bite off more than it can chew. This is the main problem that was seen during the FMPP grant period.

Additional Information

TLC's board and members want USDA and the FMPP to know how very vital and important this grant is to TLC. TLC is working diligently to support local longhorn breeders and educate the consumer of the benefits of longhorn beef, eating locally, and supporting farmers markets.

Longhorn beef is the original beef animal with wonderful health benefits for the consumer. Longhorn beef is lower in calories, cholesterol and fat than all other beef cattle breeds, and even less in all the above than white chicken. Longhorns are smaller animals and yield less meat per animal which is why the beef industry has turned away from this animal for the past 60 years. Also, longhorns do not gain weight at an economical rate in feed yards and the fact that they have horns means you can't squeeze as many into a yard to feed. It is time that breeders are able to market their own beef, benefit from the profits and teach the consumer that longhorns are indeed a beef cattle breed and that it is the healthiest beef, and one of the healthiest overall meats that can be eaten.

With out the opportunity to participate in this grant, the longhorn breed would be further down the road of being abandoned by ranchers. This grant has been a huge awakening to breeders and has opened up a door of many opportunities for breeders to continue raising a beautiful and historic breed for generations to come.

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