



Funding Awards and Training Programs

October became a bountiful month for Rural Roots after the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) announced its 2008 partnership agreements.

Rural Roots took home two awards for independent programs, and a third award through a partnership in the Cultivating Success program organized in conjunction with the University of Idaho and Washington State University.

Members will benefit from the first \$89,665 agreement that will fund the Rural Roots Legal Liability workshops being held throughout Idaho this winter. As a part of this program, Rural Roots will develop and print a "Legal Liability Handbook for Direct Marketing in Idaho" that will be given to attendees and distributed statewide after the workshop series concludes. This book will be the equivalent of the popular Washington "Greenbook." The seven full-day workshops in this program will teach people how to use the handbook and related risk management tools to decrease legal and financial risks.

A second partnership agreement for \$9,445 will fund two Rural Roots workshops in Lewiston. This program will focus on direct marketing strategies and related farm financial planning; assessing the farm direct marketing potential of products in a community/region; and ways to maximize a direct market.

Meanwhile the third partnership agreement through Cultivating Success has brought in a \$125,000 agreement. This partnership is supporting the offering of whole farm planning and business planning courses this fall, winter and spring in Washington and Idaho.

Congratulations to the hard work that made this possible and our gratitude to those who selected and endorsed our programs.



PO Box 8925
Moscow, ID 83843

Workshop Dates

Food Safety from Farm to Table: Good Agricultural Practices for Direct Marketing Farms and Ranches

Feb. 8: Sandpoint, Coeur d'Alene, Moscow, Twin Falls, Idaho Falls, and Caldwell (with the UI Extension's 2008 Small Acreage Conference)

March 7: Enterprise, OR

March 19: Kamiah, ID

March 28: Spokane, WA

Protecting Your Farm and Ranch Assets: Everything you Ever Wanted to Know About Farm Liability, but were Afraid to Ask.

March 2008: Southern Idaho sites

April 2008: Northern Idaho sites
(details to be announced)

Direct Marketing Workshops

April 2008: Lewiston, ID
(details to be announced)



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Serving all of Idaho & the Easternmost Counties of Washington and Oregon

BRINGING HOME THE HARVEST

Rural Roots Member Newsletter Volume 9 Number 3 November 2007

Risky Business Costs Us All

By Kate Baldwin

How much will it take to shake the public faith in local food systems and sustainable agriculture?

Unfortunately... Not much. We have all witnessed the power that a few bags of contaminated spinach had over an entire nation. Those food scares ignited consumer interest and drove people back to farmers' markets and CSA programs.

Boise restaurant owner and Rural Roots member Dave Krick wants to preserve that public faith and grow it into something more.

"One of the greatest things we have right now is that we are able to talk about our local food system as being safer," he said. "One of the worst things that could happen would be having some kind of a localized food safety issue. That would be devastating."

Krick, who owns the Red Feather Lounge, Bittercreek Alehouse, Reef, and Front Door, said he trusts his local suppliers more than those overseas but that doesn't mean he overlooks their operations.

"I would like to know that our farmers are getting a lot of food safety training," he said.

Krick said it is reassuring for him to see proactive, educational programs - like the Rural Roots Food Safety Workshops - addressing these issues.

Food safety concerns aren't limited to consumers and restaurant owners. Commercial kitchens, like those run by Bon Appetit Management Company, also face risks because of their large centralized food production.

Bon Appetit has a sense of personal responsibility to serve safe foods, said Marc Zammit, director of Culinary Support and Development. That means the company's employees follow rules and regulations in their kitchens, and the same is expected from their suppliers.

"I would say that (this) training would be an excellent way to promote food safety, especially if it comes with a certification of completion that is meaningful," Zammit said. "We would probably encourage our suppliers to participate, especially if it has minimal financial impact on the small family farmers."

Farmers' markets also depend on their vendors to meet basic safety standards and to limit contamination and food-borne illnesses.

Kathleen Burns, who manages the Moscow Farmers' Market, wants her vendors to understand how modern consumer attitudes and habits come into play.

"I think more and more people are looking at where their food is coming from and they are more conscious of buying locally, but as far as food safety they have an assumption that the food safety is the same as a retail store," she said. "(Consumers) think it's like Safeway or Rosauers, and they assume they can go home and eat it."

As a result, basic food safety issues - like washing and delivering produce - are becoming more important for producers who want to protect their operations and limit liability risks.

The Rural Roots Food Safety Workshops being held this winter will help producers understand their role in these systems. Nine full-day workshops will feature expert speakers from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and the University of Idaho. Experienced local producers and regional health district officials will be on hand to answer questions and cover materials from the national program for Good Agricultural Practices.

For more information on the location nearest you, contact the Rural Roots office at (208) 883-3462.



PO Box 8925, Moscow, ID 83843
(208) 883-3462

www.ruralroots.org

The Chef Connection

By Kate Baldwin

Adam Hegsted can't figure out how to get more local food into his Coeur d'Alene restaurant.

"I just don't know who to call to do it," he said.

Hegsted wants everything and anything he can get to keep the menu lively and the dishes delicious at Brix.

"We get a lot of backdoor people, like mushroom pickers and huckleberry people," he said. "The trouble so far is just finding the farmers that live around here."

"I don't know if they are intimidated to come to restaurants. I'm not sure what it is," he added.

One woman is ready to help both sides overcome the communication and time barriers that stand in the way of these profitable connections.

Lacey Menasco, the trade specialist with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, is organizing two farm-chef collaboratives to take place in north Idaho this January. Each half-day event will give farmers and ranchers a chance to sit down with local chefs and pitch their products. The pilot events will be held Jan. 28 in Coeur d'Alene and Jan. 29 in Sandpoint.

Menasco suggested that chefs should bring their menus to facilitate the conversations and producers can bring their farm plans for the 2008 season.

"It would be good for the farmer to be prepared to talk to the restaurant about what their capacity would be for growing different products," she said. "They should know how much excess they have to sell and be ready to make those commitments."

Hegsted agreed that coming prepared can make a difference. He participated in a similar event in Spokane and knows other chefs in the industry that attend these types of events in Seattle and

Wrapping Up Regional Meetings

By Kate Baldwin

Karen Strickler got a lot out of the Rural Roots Regional Meeting in Boise, but the pollinator from southern Idaho wanted more.

"Time," she said. "It did go really fast ... it certainly would have been nice to have more time."

The three-hour regional meetings filled quickly with introductions, networking, potlucks, and farm tours. Yet they seemed to close just as the discussions on sustainable agriculture and future planning began to heat up.

"I felt like the creative juices were really flowing at the time," said Strickler, who used her meeting as a chance to brainstorm methods for members to join forces and support each other on special projects like putting up hoop houses. "I was thinking of all sorts of 'gee, I wish we could do this, that and the other thing sort of ideas,' so hopefully somebody heard them."

Strickler wasn't the only member to get excited about stocking up on free Buy Fresh, buy Local labels and taking home reams of educational materials to look over this winter.

Roughly 25 people attended the Moscow meeting where they talked about wanting to get more farmers on the land and to promote consumer education. They hoped to see processing facilities built to strengthen the production chain. They also wanted implementation of state-funded programs like food stamps at farmers' markets to increase consumer access.

Meanwhile, the members attending the Boise meeting echoed the calls for more farmers to get into the local food system. The group of approximately 26 people also sought ways to limit the loss of good agricultural land to development.

In Reardan, about 13 members and guests enjoyed the chance to cover more ground in their discussions. They touched on topics that ranged from demystifying state regulations, to building stronger farmers' markets, to best practices for egg production.

"It is really helpful to have an organization whose function is to do these things, to produce these opportunities..." Strickler said. "I think it's really important for us, when we are spending most of the rest of the year on our own, it's important to have these kinds of gatherings to share notes and find out what other people are doing and to come away feeling like you are ready to go back, and try new things, and keep going."

Despite the progress at each site, some members weren't ready to call it a night. People felt intrigued after learning about developments like the newly formed Treasure Valley Food Coalition, which is working to research data and foster food policy, and the launch of the Idaho's Bounty web site www.idahosbounty.org, which uses a new on-line model for running its food co-op.

With so much information still out there, Strickler said she left her meeting in Boise "wondering what all else wasn't covered" but that didn't limit her appreciation for the event as a whole.

"I felt revitalized. I felt encouraged. And I guess one thing that I really appreciate is having an organization like Rural Roots out there providing support and providing the opportunity for us to get together," she said.

FOLLOW UP

At member request, the Rural Roots office would like to extend the time for people to submit their suggestions, concerns or compliments on the new meeting format. Look for a survey to come out this November via the Rural Roots web site at www.ruralroots.org or send your comments to kate@ruralroots.org. Members are also encouraged to send in any other input they would like considered as strategic planning begins this winter.



Boise hostess and RR board member Mary Rohlfing takes Karen Strickler and other members on a tour of her property.

Co-opting the Internet

By Kate Baldwin

What farmer or rancher doesn't want to access more customers with less work?

Idaho's newest food cooperative – Idaho's Bounty - believes it can make those connections for producers with its new on-line business model found at www.idahosbounty.org.

"A farmers' market reaches a much smaller area and takes a whole day of work to pick, and pack, and sort and sell at that market," said Jeannie Wall, director of operations. "With the cooperative web-based format, (the producers) decide what they want to sell and price it on-line and we distribute for them."

"Eventually they have a much larger market year-round to distribute to," she added.

This system helps people like Carol Rast, of Prairie Sun Farm in Fairfield. Rast already runs both a market garden and a 40-member CSA but she still wanted a suitable outlet for her off season, value-added products like jams, jellies and baked goods.

"This will be the third leg of my business. It's a good balance ... each one a little different," she said. "I think there will be some people reached that I would not have reached before."

Since it launched on Sept. 30, Wall said the cooperative has supported about 10 producers and roughly 100 customers. Those numbers are expected to shoot to 30 producers and 300 customers by this spring.

Wall explained that this business model allows for greater outreach because if they used a traditional model "a storefront would limit us to the first town that we put it in."

Rast agrees growth is on the horizon. She said she can see the program being popular with consumers who like the ease and comfort of ordering their groceries from their home computers instead of facing crowded markets.

"There is a lot of very positive energy amongst everyone," she said. "I can see where it can really become the wave of the future."

For the sellers, Rast predicts the program will benefit younger producers first because they are more computer literate and likely to try an on-line cooperative. Still the older producers won't be far behind as the Idaho's Bounty staff offer training and support to new vendors.

"It's well organized considering it is in its infancy," Rast said. "I feel like I have really learned how to work through the demands of the program."

Wall said that is intentional. The cooperative's first year

Sustainable Agriculture Resources

Keep funding alive for the ATTRA Project while Congress completes its budget work. The sustainable agriculture information service is on the web at <http://attra.ncat.org> - providing access to more than 250 publications and answers to your questions.

The National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture launched a new web site at www.sustainableagriculture.net to provide streamlined information for organizations and citizens who want to understand federal farm policy and its impact, and take action to make it better.

The Sustainable Idaho Initiative and So-dexo will co-sponsor the Understanding Sustainable Dining Options Webinar on Nov. 14. Register and attend on-line at: https://www.academicimpressions.com/web_conferences/1107-sustainable-dining.php.



Inland Northwest Food and Farming Calendar

Agriculture and Food Vulnerability Assessment Training Course
Nov. 27 – 29, Moscow, ID
www.idahoprepares.com

Idaho Environmental Summit
Dec. 11 – 14, Boise, ID
www.idahosummit.org

Idaho Dept. of Ag's Workshop for Specialty Food Producers
Jan. 29, Sandpoint, ID
imenasco@agri.idaho.gov

Rural Roots Food Safety and Legal Liability Workshops
February - March 2008, ID, OR, & WA
www.ruralroots.org

SARE's 20th Anniversary Conference
March 25 – 27, Kansas City, MO
www.sare.org

Co-opting the Internet (cont. from page 2)

goal is to build a strong model to serve people in Hagerman and the Wood River Valley.

"Once we do build that successfully, and we have a real stream-lined system for distribution, then we want to look at taking it out to other markets like Twin (Falls), and Boise, and Buhl," she said.

The immediate challenge to this spunky start-up is finding steady financing and volunteers. While four staff members and six to eight volunteers got the cooperative running, consistent resources are needed to help the program grow.

"We definitely have a lot of great support but we are certainly under-funded at this point and we are always looking for volunteers to help us with our delivery day," Wall said.

Current funding stems from modest fees and a \$60,294 grant that was received this October from the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Farmers Market Promotion Program.

Wall expects the program to thrive with time and potential expansion into markets like schools, hospitals and other institutions.

"We are selling this beautiful, local, healthy fresh food but we're up against a conventional system that subsidizes and makes processed food much cheaper and more readily accessible to the customer," she said. "Our challenge is to educate customers on the benefits to them and the community."

The Chef Connection (cont. from page 1)

Portland. He liked it when producers brought their seed catalogs and their ideas for what they know works and what has grown well before.

"I just need to know what people have so I can try it," he said.

Hegsted wants to incorporate as much as he can into his seasonal menu and that means he wants to get his hands on anything from heirloom tomatoes to specialty basil to unique meats.

"It's more of a quality issue for me," Hegsted said. "(Buying locally) you can get better produce and it's something that will stay fresher for longer and have a better flavor ... like chicken that tastes like chicken instead of chewy tissue."

Still some issues remain. Hegsted knows that purchasing in volume is difficult for some producers but most problems can be overcome as long as he can plan for it. He also asked the farmers consider developing some sort of invoice system for their chef clients because it makes local food purchases easier to pitch to the restaurant owners.

For a little bit of work early in the season, Menasco believes the rewards are well worth it especially if these events can turn potential clients into consistent customers, and if they can help farms recover their profitability and keep ag land in production.

"I would like to see more local products on restaurant menus and I would like to see farmers getting increased revenue by having a good outlet for their produce," she said. "We're creating an opportunity for that to happen."

BRINGING HOME THE HARVEST

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For more information, visit us at...
www.ruralroots.org

A Message from the Executive Director

Rural Roots' Board and staff are delighted to offer you a wide variety of programs all year long. It doesn't matter if you live in the northern or southern part of the Inland Northwest, keep your calendars open because we are bringing our workshops to you!

Food Safety: From Farm to Table workshops will be held in Spokane, Enterprise, Sandpoint, Coeur d'Alene, Moscow, Kamiah, Caldwell, Twin Falls and Idaho Falls; a two-day *direct marketing* workshop is being planned for early April in Lewiston with the intent to serve the three-corner region of NC Idaho, SE Washington and NE Oregon; and *Protecting Your Farm and Ranch Assets* workshops are coming to Sandpoint, Plummer, Kamiah, Emmet, Twin Falls, Pocatello and even farther southeast in Preston or Soda Springs.

Through the Cultivating Success program, we are partnering with UI, WSU and USDA Risk Management Agency to deliver the widely-acclaimed Small Acreage Farming and Ranching course in Colville, Pasco, Pocatello, Boise, Kamiah, and Sandpoint this fall and winter. This course is available on-line for academic students at UI and WSU. Community members can expect a non-academic version to be available on-line for them soon through www.cultivatingsuccess.org.

There is still time to sign up for the Kamiah and Sandpoint courses that start in November and January and keep an eye out this spring for courses in both business planning and food systems.

Finally, we are in the process of planning four on-farm workshops that will provide hands-on learning opportunities this spring in topics like soils, organics, livestock, and market gardening. Look for details this January at www.ruralroots.org!