



Profitable Niche Marketing on Rockridge Farm

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The Northwest Direct farm case studies were developed to provide in-depth information about the direct and semi-direct marketing opportunities that exist for farmers within their regional food system and how these opportunities are captured by a diverse set of successful producers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Direct marketing strategies employed by the farmers featured in this series include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), u-pick, farm stand and on-farm sales. Semi-direct marketing strategies include sales to restaurants, caterers, retailers (grocery stores, butchers, etc.) and processors, arranged and completed by the farmer him/herself without the use of brokers or wholesalers.

In 2002 and 2003, members of the case study research team performed in-depth on-farm interviews with each of the 12 farm families in this study. Interviews were transcribed, financial information was collected, reviewed and interpreted and outlines for the case study content were developed. Professionals were hired to write the case studies. Each case study went through a series of reviews by the case study farmers, university faculty and research team members with final permission for publishing and distribution given by the farmers themselves.

The nature of profitable small acreage farming demands flexibility and the willingness to change. These case studies, therefore, reflect a "snapshot in time" of each farm. Readers should be aware that these farms have undoubtedly evolved since the initial interviews. They should also be aware that the unique nature of each farm necessitates an individualized treatment of the analysis of farm profitability and the criteria by which that is measured. The case studies contain financial information to the extent that farmers were willing to share, and reflect our intention to educate the reader, while at the same time protecting the farmers' need for confidentiality.

It is our intent that the case studies will be of use to:

- Current farmers who want access to a greater share of the revenue that comes from the foods they grow and raise and are interested in exploring one or more marketing options.
- New farmers who are designing their production and marketing systems, who are interested in employing one or more marketing strategies, and are establishing a business plan for their farm.
- Educators and other agricultural professionals who work with producers and others interested in direct and semi-direct marketing.
- Policy-makers who are interested in enhancing the financial stability of family farms in the region through innovative policy and government funding.

A total of 12 case studies were produced by Rural Roots, Inc. and the University of Idaho as part of the Northwest Direct project. A list of the other case studies in the series is included at the end of this document. These case studies are one component of a larger USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems project called *Northwest Direct: Improving Markets for Small Farms*. For more information on this project and its outcomes, visit the project website at <http://www.nwdirect.wsu.edu/>.



Colette DePhelps, NW Direct Case Study Research Team Leader



Wade Bennett
Rockridge Enterprises
Enumclaw, Washington

Marketing Strategies Employed

Community Supported
Agriculture
Farmers' Markets
Restaurants
Ethnic Food Stores
Farm Stands

Products Grown

Hothouse Tomatoes
Japanese Pears
Bamboo
Asian Cucumbers
Morel Mushrooms
Diversified Specialty Crops
for Ethnic Markets

Value-Added Products

Juices
Vinegars

**NORTHWEST DIRECT
MARKETING
FARMER CASE STUDY**

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Profitable Niche Marketing on Rockridge Farm

Farm Overview and History

Wade Bennett says that the greatest attributes of his farm are "its quality, its novelty and its adaptability." He continues, "Those three things will keep you in business every time...whether you're making widgets or growing fruit."

Wade and Judy Bennett have been growing produce for specific niche markets on Rockridge Farm since 1992. The Bennetts own 21 acres and lease another 20, northwest of Enumclaw, Washington. They grow four main crops on their farm: Asian pears, hothouse tomatoes, Japanese and Chinese cucumbers, and bamboo. In addition to this, they grow shiso, ginseng, wasabi, lettuces, Asian greens, and over fifty niche products for specific customers, primarily within the large Asian population in the greater Seattle area. They market their products through a variety of avenues, and have a sound business plan based on diversification of crops and marketing strategies. Bennett attributes the success of his farm, in part, to this diversi-

fication. By marketing specialty products through a number of avenues, Bennett is ensuring the longevity of his farm and keeping his options open.

Wade Bennett did not grow up on a farm. He was raised in the Seattle area and has a background in business administration. He also worked in the film industry for a number of years. He and Judy have a grown son, who is not currently involved with the farming operation.

The Bennetts had previously owned farm property in Enumclaw- 20 acres within the city limits on which they raised cattle. When this industry proved to be incompatible with their location, they grew row crops there for several years. In 1990, the city wanted their land for development, and offered the Bennetts seven times what they had paid for it. They found their current property, and knew it was home. He says, "This is going to sound really funny. I chose this land because there are two 250 year old maple



Rockridge Farm's Pear Orchard

trees out here in the driveway. That was the whole reason I chose this land. I knew I could change what was here. I knew I could adapt it to something. But I bought it because I fell in love with two trees out there with a pair of screech owls in (them.) That's the whole reason. If you're going to have a reason, you might as well have one that you're happy with."

Rockridge Farm, with its majestic maples, is located on the rolling foothills of rural southeast King County, northwest of Mt. Rainier. Here, they receive at least fifty inches of rain per year. However in the summertime, there is "almost pure drought," says Bennett. Fortunately the Bennetts have two deep wells and one shallow one on the property, plus a .5 million gallon irrigation pond, fed by the creek that runs through the property. They use a small amount of municipal water each year, which is expensive. But primarily their water is provided on-farm. Water rights on the farm go back to the 1920s when a family operated raspberry farm existed there for generations.

*Bennett's Motto:
"Top quality, on time,
when promised, every
time."*

Marketing Strategies

Rockridge Enterprises is structured as a sole proprietorship business. And its proprietor, Wade Bennett, is an astute businessman with an eye for opportunity, quality, and marketing. "We farm with marketing in mind, rather than market after the fact," says Bennett. Rockridge Farm markets its unique products through several avenues. It is part of Bennett's business strategy to diversify his product sales so that he is not dependent on any one market to keep the farm financially solvent. Rockridge sells crops through farmers' markets, restaurants, CSA subscriptions, grocery stores, and farm stands. Bennett's customers expect good-tasting, high quality specialty items that they cannot get anywhere else. Bennett explains that his business plan is to grow products that are "high value, high return, niche products, (and) custom grown."

Farmers' Markets

The Bennetts began selling their Asian pears at Seattle area farmers' markets in



Rockridge Farm's value-added products

1992. Since then, their product line has expanded greatly, and in 2003, the farm sold at seven different markets. Thanks to the farm's reputation, and the many available local markets to choose from, Bennett can be particular about which markets he attends. He prefers markets that sell only food and not food and crafts, because he wants to target customers that are focused on his products. Also, he chooses markets with a space for his truck, which reduces the damage done to his products when they are over-handled. He likes markets that target discerning customers who are willing to pay a premium price for his products, and he prefers markets with good regulations to keep boundaries clear and competition fair. Bennett evaluates potential markets for their costs and benefits, ever keeping an eye on profitability.

In 2003, the farm sold products at one market on Wednesdays, two markets on Thursdays, one on Fridays, two on Saturdays, and one on Sundays. The markets run for 22-27 weeks. Bennett sells products at one Seattle market until Thanksgiving.

Wade, his wife Judy, and two employees attend the markets. It is here that Bennett can assess his profitability in terms of customer satisfaction, and also in terms of his competition. He tries to stay unique and offer things that are not already in oversupply. Bennett states, "I love farmers' markets. That's where I get instant gratification, and instant knowledge on whether I'm doing what I'm doing correctly- because either it sells or it doesn't, and people will let you know."

Restaurants

Farmers' market sales opened the door for Rockridge Farm to sell products to restaurants. To Bennett's knowledge, his sales to restaurants began in 1998, but he says, that it could have been earlier than that, since chefs come to him at the farmers' markets, pay cash, and don't always identify themselves. In 2004, Bennett delivered produce to six restaurants, and estimates that chefs from approximately ten more came to the farmers' market to buy from him there. Some restaurants request that specific food items be grown for them, which Bennett then sells to them at a retail rate.

Buying local is "chic," Bennett says, meaning that people are starting to care about where their food is grown. His products that are purchased by restaurants are often identified by farm name on the menus. He intentionally markets to restaurants that value locally produced food, and want the types of items he grows. While chefs often approach him for product, he sometimes gives sample boxes away to potential customers, if he sees an opportunity there.

Bennett says that when marketing to a restaurant, one needs to be familiar with its style, the food it serves, and with what the manager expects in terms of service. He explains, "It's knowing the restaurants... that are going to want your product... and then, making sure that your organization is capable (of delivering) in a timely manner, in a business-like manner...It's a little more stringent. You have more boundaries. And you have to be much better organized." Bennett finds that restaurateurs are very faithful customers when they are treated well. Therefore, he endeavors to offer them, "top quality, on time, when promised, every time."

Wade Bennett says that the risk of marketing to restaurants is that if there is a crop failure, it can really hurt one's relationship with the restaurant. He has to over-plant to cover the possibility of a failure, and this

The Intangible Benefits of Farming

Wade Bennett says, "I get to do what I want- not always when I want to- but I get to do basically what I want. Everything that you see, feel, touch, and smell here is a product of my design.

I have, with the exception of Mother Nature's company here... complete control over its design. I have control over its excitement. I have control over its feel. I have control over how other people perceive it. That's what I do. I provide people with something they can't live without.

You have to eat. So why are you picking me (and) buying my products? Because I'm giving you something that nourishes... your soul, your whole life. OK? Now isn't that better than building computers (or) writing software? I mean, come on.

So there's a hell of a reward to it- at least to me. Plus I can walk in at the end of the day and my conscience is completely clean. I never have to do anything I don't want to do. There are never any compromises... So, I guess in that way, there's a bit of nobility to it."



infringes upon his production for other sales avenues.

Community Supported Agriculture

Wade Bennett was asked by his customers to begin a CSA subscription service. The service began in 2000 with twelve customers. The second year, Bennett offered 23 shares, and when two families moved away, he capped the subscription at 21 shares. Bennett grows crops specifically for his CSA customers. He offers 20 weeks of produce and juices in a 10 pound box, which the customer picks up at either the farmers' market or on-farm.

In the beginning, Bennett offered a conventional CSA with such dull vegetables as zucchini and beans, but, he says, "Nobody wanted it." It is his "Adventure Pack," or "Exotic Package" that sells, even though he often has to educate subscribers about the produce provided and how to prepare it. In this package, a subscriber receives such treats as wasabi, rats tail radishes, and Asian pears, as well as freshly prepared juices.

Most of his CSA customers live in Seattle. They are between 25-35 years old, married, and have at least one child. In 90% of

his subscribing families, one spouse is Asian, and all of the families are in a high-income bracket.

He considers this avenue to be an important part of his diverse operation, but because it doesn't generate as much profit as his other operations, and because it is labor intensive to pack the individual shares, he doesn't plan to expand the program. The advantage to offering the subscription is the lump sum payments received in April, which help Bennett make payroll during an otherwise slim time financially.

Farm Stands

In 1999, Bennett began selling produce through neighboring farm stands. He saw this as yet another opportunity for diversification. By selling through other people's stands, Bennett can use labeling to get the farm name out there, and sell his products without paying the expense of operating his own stand. Until 2003, Bennett also sold his produce on-farm, out of one of his outbuildings. He did not offer a U-Pick option, however, due to the insurance liabilities and logistics. Ultimately, his cost analysis showed that it was more profitable to sell through

"Trust is everything."



One of Wade Bennett's Greenhouses



Bamboo Stakes support crops in Bennett's greenhouse.

someone else's stand, even with their taking 50% of the retail price, than to operate his own on-farm stand.

In 2003, Bennett sold produce to four stands. This number was reduced from previous years, because he did not want to flood the market and drive the prices down. Customers can find a variety of Rockridge products at local stands, including Asian pears, cucumbers, tomatoes, and juices. They also sell a lot of tomatoes through the stands, and lots of cider. The Bennetts choose to sell at farm stands because they consider it to be an important community service to provide support to local businesses, by participating in the farm stand sales. He says, "It's nice to keep independent small businesses going. There's a personal reward (in it) as well, because you know their family, you know their kids, you know their buildings, (and) you know their staff.... It's part of community building."

Grocery Stores

Fifty percent of Rockridge Farm's total crops go to grocery stores, primarily "Mom and Pop" Asian stores in the Rainier Valley and the international district in Seattle. Often the Bennetts are contacted by the stores looking for certain items. But in the beginning, Bennett hit the pave-

ment, introducing himself, and giving samples, to generate interest and get the farm name out.

Several years ago, it was illegal to import fresh bamboo shoots. There was a large untapped market, therefore, for the local production of this staple in the Asian diet. Bennett introduced himself into the ethnic markets by growing bamboo. It is now legal to import the fresh product, but Bennett's relationship with the grocery owners remains strong. One-hundred percent of his grocery sales are to the Asian markets, 75%-80% of his restaurant sales are to ethnic restaurants, and 20%-30% of his direct sales, such as farmers' markets are to Asian consumers. He uses relationship marketing to reach these customers, saying that "trust is everything." By learning about the culture and language of the store owners, by getting to know the families, and by demonstrating an appreciation and respect for the way his products are used and prepared in the community, Bennett says that he is "treated like family."

Distributors

Rockridge Farm has sold to distributors, but Wade Bennett doesn't like to. He estimates that he has to do it about once a year, when the market is flooded with an

item, or an item just isn't selling. Bennett says, "That's where my product goes that I can't sell anywhere else." In terms of profitability and marketing practices, he continues "I'd rather juice my product or compost it than take it to a wholesaler.... I (really) don't want to put my name on that product."

Diversification as a Business Strategy

Rockridge Farm's farmers' market sales led to his grocery store sales. The market sales, as well as the farm stand sales also led to restaurant sales. Bennett says, "It's all interconnected."

Wade Bennett believes that it is integral to his business strategy to sell through diverse marketing avenues. He explains, "Each piece probably wouldn't make you a living, but when you put them all together, then the economy of it makes you a living. It cuts down on your transportation and delivery costs (to deliver to restaurants and markets at the same time.) You're using the same boxes. You're hitting multiple marketing avenues. If something collapses...like in the stock market, you're not out.... Many of the (producers) take all their stuff down, and want to sell it wholesale and just get rid of it. That's putting all of your future... in one basket and it's very dangerous... That's why we've lost so many farms since the 1970's. They're not keeping their options open. And you have to. It's like any other business."

Bennett does not spend any money on advertising. He does, however, intentionally seek publicity through newspaper and magazine articles, letters to the editor, and word of mouth. He explains, "We try to get published once a month.... It's right in our business plan." Additionally, he always asks consumers how they came to find out about the farm.

Bennett has discovered that by selling to so many different consumers through a variety of markets, he succeeds in making his farm name known. He explains that people have sometimes told him that they thought his business was "huge" because of his farm's brand name familiarity, saying, "It's important to be known and branded for the products you produce.... So, we've gone out of our way to make sure that we're known for doing exotic, fun, and exciting edible produce- and only the best. When you buy from us, you buy taste." And taste, in Bennett's opinion, is not easy to find these days. He explains, "The norm in the grocery stores right now is to have something that looks great and has a shelf life of four weeks with no spoilage, and tastes like cardboard.... (But) your restaurant doesn't want that. Your homeowner doesn't want that. The only person that wants that is the grocery store, because they get a higher markup."



A new raspberry field on the Bennett's property



Ground is prepped for row crops.

Effects of Marketing Strategies on Production Techniques

Rockridge Farm's emphasis on customer relations determines Wade Bennett's philosophy on production. He uses almost no chemicals, and protects his land and his business longevity by using sustainable practices. He does not raise any animals on his farm to keep the risk of pathogen contamination to a minimum. He does not hold any organic or Food Alliance certifications, but rather relies on his reputation for integrity and quality to sell his products. He says, "If you, the customer, trust me to grow my product, that's all I need. And I invite every one of my customers here to walk the place, because if they walk the place, they understand who we are, where their food is coming from, and we never have a problem. No one ever questions what we do."

The Bennetts started raising Asian pears on their previous farm as a treat for themselves. When Bennett realized that people liked them, and that there was a market, he continued to raise them on their current property, and has an orchard of over 3000 trees on ten acres. When the prices for pears in eastern Washington began to drop, Bennett decided to diversify. He now raises 5.5 acres of bamboo, which began as a small endeavor to raise canes to be used on-farm for tree props. Eventually though, nurseries wanted the plants, and restaurants wanted the shoots. Now he sells the plants as well to wholesale markets.

He further expanded his production over the years to include more specialty crops such as Asian greens, ginseng, shiso, edamame, Japanese and Chinese cucumbers,

radishes, French sorrel, radicchio, Italian chickory, a variety of basil, russeted apples, sunchokes, figs, and Satsuma plums. Bennett grows morel mushrooms in woodchips in the shade of the fruit orchard, and in 2003 they sold 300 pounds of mushrooms to restaurants. On their rented parcel of land, the Bennetts raise a mix of things, including many of his lower cost/ lower return items, such as sweet corn.

When Judy Bennett wanted to retire from her job to work on the farm full-time, Wade Bennett set her up in the greenhouses to grow hothouse tomatoes, telling her, "You need to grow for flavor." He explains, "We sell them to restaurants and we sell them at farmers' markets. We do pretty dang well."

The Bennett property is diverse, and comprises a dozen different soil types. Wade Bennett's farm management practices include knowing what to grow and where to grow it. Some of the hardier pears are grown on the bottom of the slope on which the orchard is planted, due to the colder temperatures there. The row crops are grown in four feet of compost, situated in a pocket of land that Bennett says "could be a gravel pit." He augments his soil with manure from neighboring farms, which he composts. He also adds lime, kelp, seaweed, and other nutrients to the soil. He does not save seeds, except when necessary, as in the case of some of the more exotic crops, the seeds of which are not available through most catalogues.

Running such a diverse operation is labor intensive. Bennett estimates that he and his wife work six days per week- twelve hours per day in the winter, and seventeen hours per day for the rest of the year. Though they are very productive, and run a profitable farming operation, Bennett says that they are still "lucky to make \$14.00 per

Figure 1: Gross Income from Sales, 2003

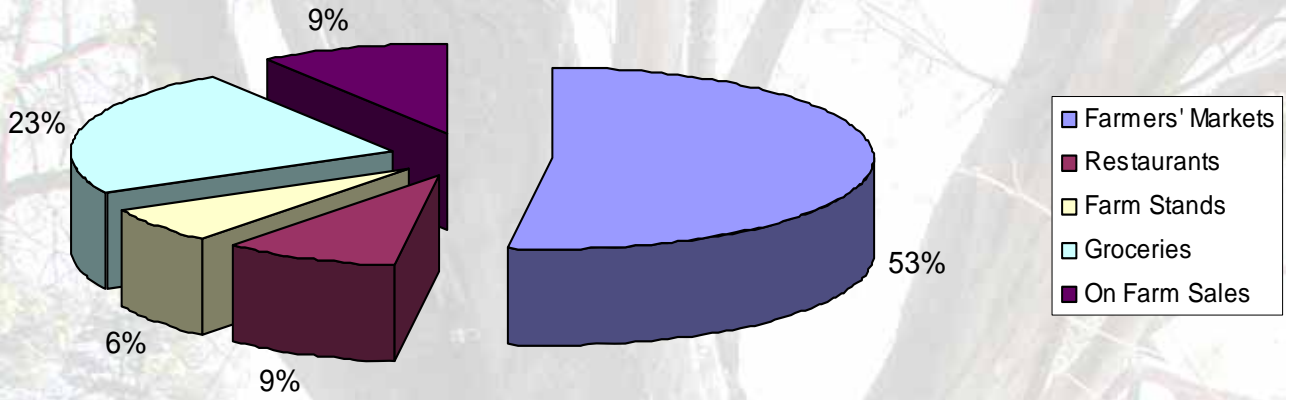


Figure 2: Increase in Farmers' Market Sales Over a Three Year Period: 2002-2004

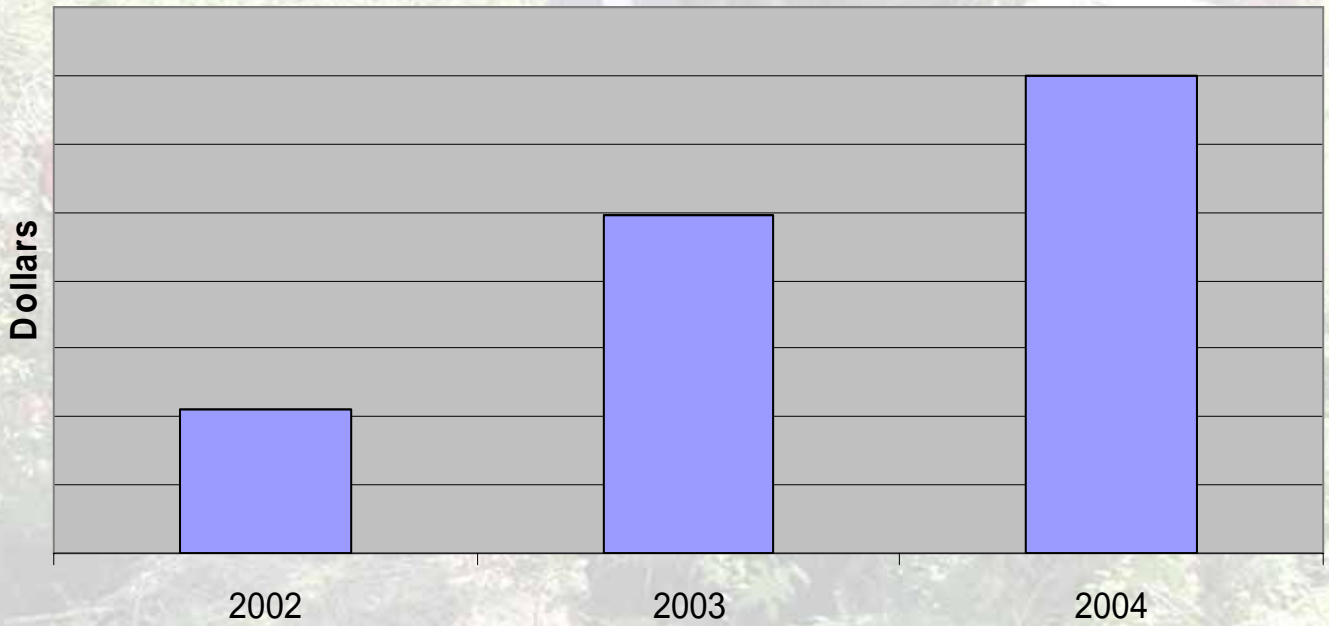
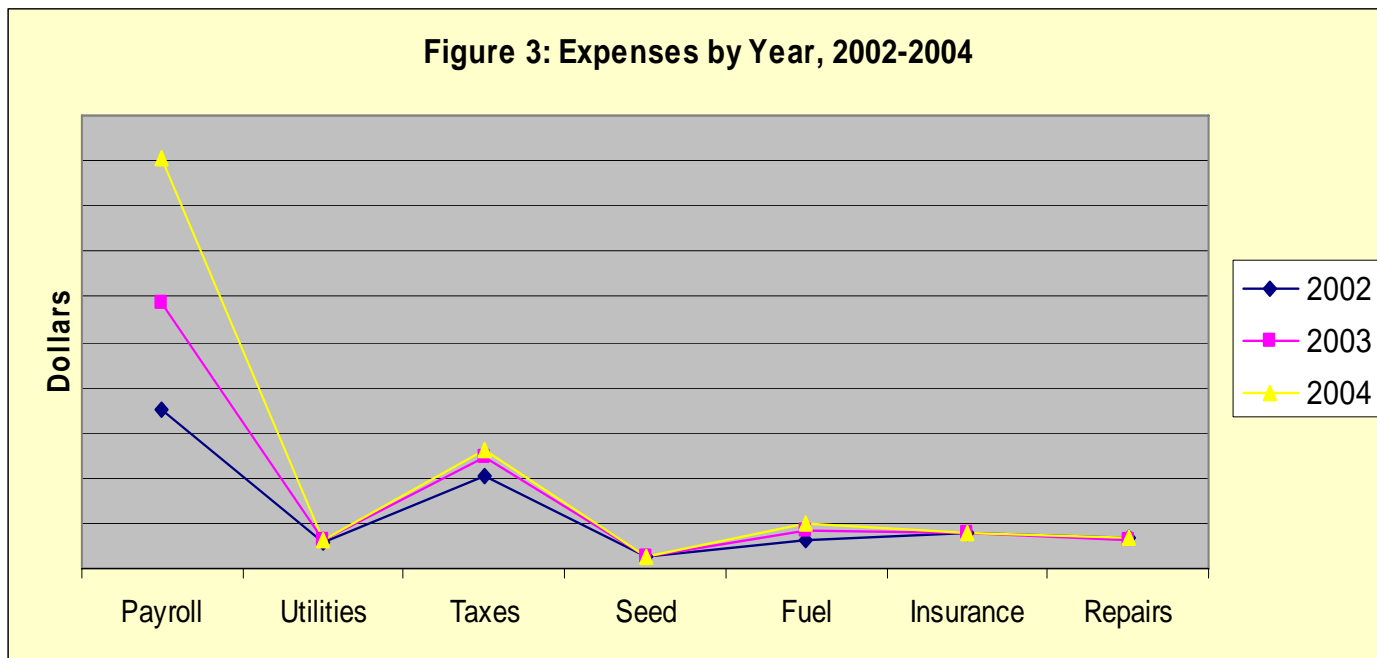


Figure 3: Expenses by Year, 2002-2004



hour” in wages. Judy Bennett’s work hours are 100% on farm, specializing in the tomatoes and lettuce crops, while Wade Bennett spends 90%-95% of his time direct marketing farm products and overseeing production of cucumbers, beans, and the orchard crops. Bennett says, “I learned a long time ago that you can’t have two bosses in one building.” By dividing the production and marketing, and discussing operating decisions with each other, Wade and Judy Bennett run a fairly seamless farm business.

They have one full-time employee who lives on the property. He is responsible for irrigation, and building and equipment maintenance. He works very autonomously, says Bennett. The Bennetts also hire approximately 17 part time employees, plus the occasional intern. They hire two half-time people to help Judy Bennett in the hothouse. They hire employees to help at the farmers’ markets, who are specifically trained for that purpose. Bennett says, “The type of person you will hire to plant your crops is not the kind of person you will hire to sell your crops.” During harvest, they employ several kids and parents from the local home schooling network. The Bennetts pay by weight for all harvesting, and minimum hourly wage for tasks such as training tomatoes and weeding. All of their employees are from the local community, and fall into 3 distinct

categories: teens for the heavy labor, at home moms and their children for harvest, and retired people for the greenhouse work.

Equipment

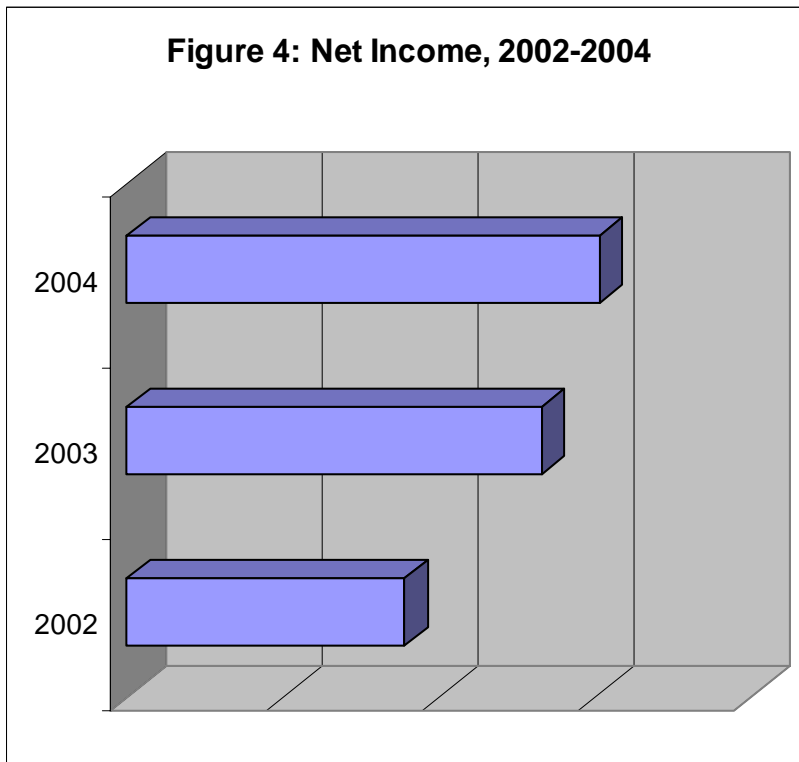
Wade Bennett says, that with the exception of his first tractor, a 5000 Ford, “I buy equipment new. Period.... I want to get my 30 years on my equipment, and yes, it is expensive, but if you get it and you take care of it, you die with it. It’s that simple.” Bennett owns three tractors: a compact John Deere for tilling and mowing, a medium capacity John Deere for plowing and spraying, and his 5000 Ford for heavy rototilling. He also owns mowers, a plow with disk sets and hillers. He pays cash for all of his equipment.

Profitability by Enterprise

Wade Bennett says, “I’m not the world’s best grower. I am one of the best marketers.... I want to have fun with what I’m doing and I want to make a profit at the same time.” The Bennetts made a large profit off the sale of their first farm. This allowed them to buy their current place, and to have the capital to build up the farm business. A few good years with the orchard also allowed them to pay off their debts and since then, they have made all

“I’m not the world’s best grower. I am one of the best marketers.”

Figure 4: Net Income, 2002-2004



"R2-D1" A hard cider fermentation vessel.

their purchases with cash. Bennett says he hopes to continue without generating debt.

Since 1992, the farm has made a profit every year. The gross sales for the farmers' markets in 2003 were three times the amount of gross sales for every enterprise in 1994. Bennett achieved this by expanding his sales avenues, diversifying his crops, and looking for new niches in which to sell for a premium price.

Farmers' markets bring in the highest gross income of all other sales avenues. Between 2002 and 2004, income from Farmers' market sales provided 30% to 60% of total gross receipts (see Figure 1.) Sales at farmers' markets increased by 135% between 2002 and 2003, and increased by another 41% between 2003 and 2004 (see Figure 2.) Bennett plans to add a market or two each year, if possible, in order to increase gross sales. He has found that Seattle markets can tolerate a 40% price increase on premium items, due to the economy there. Bennett endeavors to bring in at least \$1,000 a day at each of the farmers' markets.

In 2003, Bennett charged \$25 per week for a 10 pound box of produce and juices for 20 weeks during the growing season. This price is actually half of what Bennett can get for the same produce at farmers' markets. The CSA service, therefore, is limited in profitability, but an important component of the diversification of the operation, and very important for building customer relations and reputation.

Rockridge Farms relied less upon restaurant sales and farm stand sales between 2002 and 2004. While gross sales increased during those three years, the overall contribution of restaurants and farm stands decreased some, while the farmers' markets' contribution increased.

During the same period, sales to groceries remained pretty stable, accounting for 22%- 29% of total sales. Prices were negotiated with the store owners at the time of purchase. Bennett's effort to understand the cultural nuances of selling to the Asian markets has smoothed his ability to strike a fair bargain between the parties.

The expenses at Rockridge Farm has steadily increased as the operation has expanded, but not at the same rate as the profits. Payroll is the largest expenditure item, and in keeping up with the minimum wage, increased by over 50% each year between 2002 and 2004. Payroll was 51% of total expenses in 2003, with seed being the smallest expense the same year, at 2% of expenses (see Figure 3.)

Other factors work in the Bennett's favor to keep expenses down. They produce 95% of their fruits and vegetables, and barter for their meat, providing nearly 100% of their food annually. According to the Department of Labor's 2003 Consumer Expenditure Survey, this accounts for at least \$3,129 worth of groceries. Another phenomenal savings occurs through Bennett's lease arrangement. There is a surplus of arable land in the area around Enumclaw due to the recent closure of several dairies. Bennett has managed to farm neighboring property through a straight trade arrangement between him and the land's owner, by providing a certain amount of product to the family, and by agreeing to manage the

land in a way that maintains its fertility for future farm and ranch enterprises. No money changes hands in this unique arrangement.

Figure 4 shows the increase in net profitability between 2002 and 2003. Bennett's marketing skills and eye for financial detail has kept the farm profitable, even in the face of adversity. In 2003, a winter storm, with winds of greater than 90 miles an hour, flattened several of his outbuildings and greenhouses. Bennett says, "You have to remember that Mother Nature is your mistress here. And she can reach out and tell you that you're not going to make a profit sometimes." After the windstorm, the cost of reconstruction was substantial, yet Bennett still managed to keep his business afloat.

Adaptability- the Key to Profitability

In order to remain profitable, Bennett continues to experiment with different crops and has dropped some from his production list. Some of his "used to grows" include squash, Halloween pumpkins, gourds, and some lettuces. Bennett asks himself, when choosing a new product "does my customer want it, and are they willing to pay the premium for it?" Bennett continues, "The other thing is, does it excite me? Sometimes I will grow a crop just because I want to grow that crop."

Many of his experiments, such as rats tail radishes, have proven to be very successful. Others, such as pears, while popular, can have erratic value on the market due to over-production. In order to be able to adapt to fluctuating market conditions, Bennett purchased equipment for juicing to manage excess fruit. In 2004, they got a license for processing hard cider and vinegars. This way, Bennett could change low value crops into profitable value added products. Bennett says that since Asian pears have become such a popular item, he sells the premium fruit and juices the rest. In 2003, when pears dropped to an abysmal price, he turned around and juiced them, adding raspberries from the farm, and sold the juice for \$8.50 per half gallon. He considers this to be a good adaptation for an established orchard that produces 200,000 pounds of fruit per year, but for which premium prices are hard to come by.

This adaptability and readiness to ride the waves of market trends is one key to the Bennetts' success. Bennett achieves this with close record keeping, weekly meetings with his wife and his employees, and a daily analysis of how every crop and every sales avenue is doing. He tries to project sales trends for 1, 3, 5, and 10 years into the future. Bennett explains, "Say I get out to June, or July, and suddenly the market is flooded with cherry tomatoes. I'd better be quick enough to turn around and have something else in the ground within four weeks that can turn me a profit that goes a different direction, because I know that price is going to tank.... You have to be that flexible and that mobile, and the only way you're going to do that is by examining your numbers on a daily basis. You've got to be very, very in tune with it." By staying in tune and flexible, Bennett makes informed business choices that benefit himself and his customers.

Community Involvement

"You've got to be involved, otherwise you're letting someone else control your destiny," says Bennett. Wade and Judy Bennett work hard on community issues, and care about the impacts of government on the future of farming. At



one point, King County officials wanted Bennett and other farmers to put in 300 ft buffers on either side of the creek running through their properties. This action would have taken out 1200 of Bennett's trees. The county wanted to mandate these buffers to reduce runoff into the creek from farming operations, but Bennett thought they were taking the wrong approach. He says, "I live with this land, and I don't compromise with it. If you tell me that my water has to be cleaner coming off my land than going into it, not a problem! I can come up with enough solutions to deal with it....If it comes on my property, it comes off a lot cleaner than it ever came in here." Bennett was the president of the Farm Bureau at the time this action was being proposed. He and 250 other citizens protested, and the measure didn't pass.

Bennett volunteers a good deal of time in other ways. The Bennetts open their farm for tours by local preschools. Wade Bennett served on the Washington State Department of Agriculture Small Farm Advisory Board. He has served on the King County Farmers' Market Task Force to help drop health department barriers at farmers' markets. He has taught marketing classes so the small farmers in the area can better know how to sell their products and make a profit. Through these political and educational activities, Bennett says, "We've enhanced the industry as a whole. We're helping change the direction that we're going."

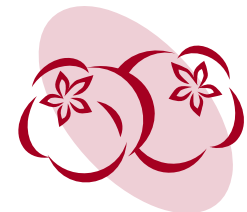
Philosophy, Goals, and Advice to New Farmers

For Wade Bennett, farming is a lifestyle, rather than a job. He is very keen on staying profitable, but at the same time cares deeply about the land, local food systems, and sustainability. According to Bennett, "We need to come back in line with the slow food movement, with organics.... (We need to) teach people to live again- and food is such an integral part of that. While farming is "not a way to get rich," he says that he has no exit strategy, and that he plans to grow old on his farm.

When asked what changes he foresees taking place in his farm business, Bennett says, "None- if you assume that our entire process is change." He adds, "If we ever sit back on our laurels and stop evolving, we're going out of business."

With no rest anticipated, Bennett plans to continue his expansion into restaurants, and increase the number of farmers' markets he attends. He thinks that he might look into institutional sales in the future, if the profit margin is right. He says that he would like to offer a CSA subscription, and other direct sales, to senior citizens at a discount.

Bennett advises new farmers to be adaptable. He tells them to know their clientele and have a good business plan. He says that they should "obtain quality that is uncompromising." Wade and Judy Bennett successfully market their quality goods in the Seattle area, and grow their products using sustainable practices. Wade Bennett encourages others to do the same, saying "Quality always sells.... And you'll never be ashamed of it."



Northwest Direct is a four-year research project involving the five partners listed below. Our goal is to increase profitability of small farms in the Pacific Northwest through research and extension. We have documented locally based food systems, developed case studies of direct marketing farmers, fostered expansion of farmers markets, and addressed regulatory and infrastructure barriers to direct sales. Northwest Direct is coordinated by Washington State University's Small Farms Program. More information is available at www.nwdirect.wsu.edu.



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The Northwest Direct Farmer Case Study Series:

Idaho:

Measuring Success on the Urban Fringe:
Meadowlark Farm #01

Profitability through Diversification:
Greentree Naturals Farm #02

Growing Profits at Home:
Riley Creek Blueberry Farm #03

Mid-Size Producer, Capturing Local Value: M&M Heath
Farms #04:

Oregon:

Marketing Quality on Creative Growers Farm #05

Life in the Slow Lane:
Raising Pastured Poultry on Norton Creek Farm #06

Ideal-Driven Farming in Oregon's High Desert:
Fields Farm #07

High Expectations: Transitioning to Direct Markets at
Ace High Orchards #08

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