

Making a difference

Growing Local Foods in North Dakota

A North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Project
NDSU Rural and Agribusiness Enterprise Development

The Situation – Local Foods in ND

There is a rising interest in local foods. Over \$5 billion in local foods were bought in 2010, a \$4 billion growth from 2007. The growth is driven by: (1) increasing number of farmers markets, CSAs, and direct farmer sales making locally grown products available. In ND nine farmers markets have been added in just the last two years; (2) growing demand for locally grown foods; (3) expanding effort to nurture and develop new agriculture entrepreneurs; and (4) increasing numbers of farm families interested in providing fresh, local produce and meat.

Demand is driven by consumers, institutions and retail including supermarkets and WalMart developing local food sections. Yet North Dakota remains behind the average. Work shows there is untapped demand and more farmers interested in growing for this market.

Extension Response

With this situation, a North Central Region SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) grant was written to support leaders in expanding the local food effort in their area based on local needs. Efforts focused both on demand and supply or both. Farmers, Extension employees, and agencies built teams to first learn about increasing local food awareness and producer interest and then doing local projects to encourage an expansion of the demand and supply of local foods.

Impacts

Twenty-four projects from 18 participating groups were funded. The results of this effort included:

- Youth introduced to local foods and the growing process
- New farmers markets, a central ND buying club, & a food coop launch
- One producer expanding with a value-added niche
- Expansion of crops found suitable to grow in ND along with season-expansion tools.
- New marketing methods tried

- 23 new businesses were started and 236 existing businesses were supported
- Reported growth in yearly gross sales of over \$104,000.
- Eight new employees added
- Over 1000 volunteers provided 4500 hours of support for the projects
- Support networks for farmers were formed and a compiled resources added at: <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness/sm-all-farm-farm-diversification>.
- Successful food coop capital campaign reaching \$750,000
- PR effort around “ugly food” & its value
- At least 12 of the projects are continuing
- More at:
 - <http://www.slideshare.net/glenmuske/nd-local-foods-sare-project>
 - <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/impactreports/reports/2015-impact-reports/15gf-soeby-nfsh.pdf>

Feedback

- Project gave rise to product outlets as well as to producer-support groups
- Effort brought together and motivated skilled volunteers.
- Project combined interests of area urban customers and regional rural producers
- This effort has resulted in receiving two other grants allowing further expansion of two projects. One participant wrote, “This could not have happened without the LFLT.”
- New networks formed with local partners and higher educational institutions
- All of the food club buyers and sellers said they would be back next year

Contact

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