

Taste of Place

Technical Sessions

Follow-up Interviews with Dairy Farmers Interested in Developing Value-added Products in the Hardwick Region of Vermont

This publication is the result of tax-supported funding from USDA Rural Development and as such is not copyrightable. It may be reprinted with the customary crediting of the source.

June 30, 2010



Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Methods	4
Findings	7
Conclusions	10
<i>Contact Information</i>	12
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	13

Introduction

- The *Taste of Place* project has been focused on increasing demand for Vermont food products through the place-based marketing;
- However, questions have been raised over whether the supply of value-added products, like artisan cheese, will be able to meet the increased demand; and
- It was proposed that a series of interviews be conducted to determine (a) the barriers for current dairy producers and (b) what support can be offered to overcome those barriers.

Methods

Selection Criteria

- Owner/operator of an active dairy farm;
- Within 30 miles of Hardwick, Vermont;
- With no more than 500 cows;
- Not currently engaged in value-added; but
- Interested in selling “artisan, value-added” products.

Methods

Areas Covered during the Discussions

- Overview of their current farming operation;
- Vision for the future of their farm business;
- Anticipated timeline for bringing a value-added product to the market;
- Resources that are needed to develop a value-added product; and
- Barriers to developing a value-added product.

Methods

Interview Process

- Dairy farms in the Hardwick region of Vermont were contacted by phone and email; and
- In-person interviews were conducted from March 2010 to May 2010;
 - 3 phone conversations;
 - 2 email exchanges; and
 - 4 in-depth, on-farm interviews.

Findings

- Each farmer was at a different stage in the process of developing a value-added product;
- Each farmer needed information on a different topic area, depending on the (a) product they were developing and (b) stage they were at in the development process;
 - Producer-made artisan cheese and/or milk following specifications for offsite cheese makers;
 - Other products included bottled-milk, pudding, farmstead cheeses, and whey-fed pork; and
- A recurrent theme in all of the discussions was the need for a general “resource guide.”

Findings

- Not all producers interviewed were inclined to make value-added product from their fluid milk;
- Reasons cited included the following:
 - Large time investment;
 - High equipment costs;
 - Prohibitive state regulations and permitting;
 - Unfamiliar with distribution and marketing of value-added products; and
 - Difficulties securing financing, due to the current economy.

Findings

- Concern about the complexity of running their current farm business and then adding a new business with production, distribution, marketing, etc.
- Interested in market research in Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York; and
- Interest in Farm-to-School programs and other programs that would help prepare the next generation of farmers.

Conclusions

- A resource guide for farmers interested in developing value-added products should be developed;
- This resource guide should be designed so it is useful for a farmer at any point during the development process; thus, it should include the following topic areas:
 - Product development;
 - Government regulations and permits;
 - Business models and plans;
 - Financial access information including grant resources;
 - Distribution channels; and
 - Marketing support.

Conclusions

- For an example of what a resource guide *may* look like, see *Resource Guide to Organic & Sustainable Vegetable Production* at <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/vegetable-guide.html#who11>
- Each topic area in the guide should cover the following:
 - General readings and publications on the subject;
 - Specific resources, forms, and other guides;
 - Contact information for experts in the area; and
- Farms need help knowing what products are being demanded by consumers and how to produce, distribute, and market those products.

Contact Information

- Center for an Agricultural Economy,
PO Box 451, 41 South Main Street
Hardwick, VT 05843
- Center for Rural Studies
206 Morrill Hall
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405



Acknowledgements

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets
Montpelier, Vermont

Castanea Foundation
Montpelier, Vermont

Vermont farmers

For your dedication, hard work and willingness to share with us
your hardships and triumphs, we thank you.