Community Food Circles: Directly Linking Farmers and Consumers

Mary Hendrickson

Food Circles Networking Project University of Missouri Outreach and Extension Columbia, Missouri

The U.S. food system is both globalized and industrialized. However, the globalized, industrialized food system has not worked for many small farmers because it generally requires intensive capital outlays and high mechanization. Many consumers are also raising concerns about the food system. The Food Circles Networking Project links those farmers, consumers, and small business people who don't want to participate in the global system in localized, personalized food systems.

Such food systems have several advantages for small farmers. Personal relationships are created around producing and consuming food and are embedded in community interaction. These relationships take a long time to develop but are harder for the mass market to duplicate. By involving consumers directly in the food

system, small farmers can avoid many of the capitalintensive production and marketing practices of the dominant food system.

Small farmers need to recognize the differing concerns that consumers have about the food system - those rooted in concern for the environment, social equity, food safety, humane treatment of animals, rural communities, or an ethical food system - and produce food that can satisfy those concerns. One way of connecting farmers with consumers is by forming food circles, groups of concerned citizens who link farmers and consumers together.