



Down to Earth: Reports from the field

Innovative Small Farmers' Outreach Program (ISFOP): West Central Region

Cultivating Direct and Wholesale Market Outlets By Miranda Duschack and Katie Nixon, Small Farm Specialists

Smart business is all about diversification. As the demand for local food grows, small farmers need to consider all the available marketing options for selling farm products. Many small farmers use direct marketing as their only selling strategy, however this can be limiting. For example, the number of farmers' market visitors can fluctuate during periods of inclement weather often leaving you with excess perishable produce. It makes smart business sense to cultivate other avenues of marketing. Why not consider wholesaling? Wholesaling can save you time and generate profit. The following tips will help you consider the various options available.

Restaurants: This may be a good market to start with to get your feet wet. Restaurants don't typically buy the large quantities that other wholesalers need. You can generally fetch a price closer to retail from the restaurants, so price-wise it might not be as much of a shock.

- Never approach a chef during the busy hours, like just before or during breakfast, lunch and dinner time. Instead, go in the restaurant during 'off hours.' It is generally a good idea to take samples of your products with you to give to the chef as a gesture of good will so he or she can see the quality of your product.
- Some chefs like to see a list of produce you can offer them throughout the entire growing season. Before going into the restaurant, type up a list of your produce and when it will be ready for harvest. Leave this with the chef and make sure your contact information is included along with a brief description of your farm. Get them invested in your story.
- Chefs like interesting foods, but they also need the staples like tomatoes and lettuce greens. Ask them if there is something you can grow for them, but don't make promises you may not be able to keep. (cont. p.3. . .)

In The Spotlight: Cedar Lane Farm *Organic Market-Farming in the Midwest*

by Jim Pierce

You may be feeling lost when trying to find your way to Cedar Lane Farm roughly 60 miles north of Kansas City, Missouri, but you will know you are there when you find a tight little drive lined and overshadowed with cedar trees. At the end of the lane you will find Carrie Kesse, owner of Cedar Lane Farm, a beacon for organic farming, surrounded by industrial agriculture as far as the eye can see.

As the cedars thin out and the farm emerges you are met by a log house built by Kesse's grandparents in the 1960s. The land has been in the family for nearly fifty years. It was originally farmed the way it was done before the industrialization of agriculture, with few, if any, chemicals and when crops were rotated.

While her family was still on the farm, Kesse was pursuing a career in conventional greenhouse management until one of her classes exposed her to a chemical company representative. She awakened to the idea of farming without chemicals ever since she heard a chemical representative speak in a class she was taking. One of the students asked this representative if she, as a pregnant woman, should be concerned about exposure even in protective gear, to the chemicals he was a proponent of. (cont. p.2. . .)

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Carrie Kesse, owner of Cedar Lane Farm, in her high tunnel

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He responded without hesitation saying he would not risk it even with the protective gear. At that moment, Kesse realized she was preparing herself for a career that would constantly be exposing her to those chemicals and would be putting her health at risk. As a result, she decided to educate herself as to how to grow organic and healthy food.

Kesse's first internship as a part of her degree was at a conventional and automated greenhouse. From that experience she learned to consider labor efficiency, always keeping in mind the cost of labor. After she graduated she began researching farms for apprenticing organic methods. She attended the Northeast Organic Farming Association conference which led her to Red Fire Farm in Massachusetts where she gained valuable experience in organic farming.

She invested some of her savings in a used tiller and a high tunnel to start farming on her own three years ago. She started with a half acre of diverse crops that she sold at farmers' markets in Liberty, Zona Rosa, Leawood, and Atchison.

In early March, Kesse's high tunnel filled with fall planted spinach, kale, and lettuce, which she sells locally beginning in December through March. Her summer markets, the Liberty and Briarcliff Farmer's Markets, have helped her get started with immediate sales.

Keeping in mind the cost of labor, Kesse is developing markets closer to home which would give her more time to farm. This past winter she started a winter delivery route for her greens. She emails to her customers availability, prices and delivery times. Of the winter greens she says, "I am happy with winter greens, except for cold hands, picking and washing!" She sees the development of a delivery/drop-off point as having potential and will start again when field harvest begins later this season. For 2011, she intends to put more energy into developing a route and attending a small local market.

After the temperatures push her greens crops to bolting and bitterness she grows and hardens off more vegetable transplants for field production in the high tunnel.

The outside production occurs in three patches. There are a total of two acres planted in a mix of annual and perennial crops. She rotates cut flowers, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, peppers, squash, melons, greens, cole crops (those in the mustard family) and cover crops through these patches. The next crops scheduled to be set out are the onion, tomato and pepper transplants.

Kesse is currently using Organic Materials Research Institute (ORMI) approved dehy-



Kesse on her farm

drated chicken manure in conjunction with cover crops for fertility in the field. Her next step is to develop her own compost-making system sometime in the future. Some constraints she mentioned are the regulations and lack of equipment for handling it.

Kesse is optimistic about the future of organic and local food and makes a commitment to the health of her customers and herself by continually investing time to learn more. This past winter she attended the Great Plains Growers Conference in St. Joseph, Missouri, the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers conference held in Tulsa, Oklahoma this year and the Northeast Organic Farming Conference in Vermont.

wise they will serve as a breeding ground, (5) if needed, be ready to sacrifice your trap crop as an early crop and destroy them as soon as the pest infestation gets too high, and (6) always keep farm records. What trap crops worked best and against which insect pests?

Examples: In Massachusetts, six butternut growers planted a Blue Hubbard border around butternut squash fields that ranged in size from 2-6 acres. These six fields were compared to conventional butternut fields where beetles were controlled with full-field insecticide sprays. Fields were scouted twice weekly until first leaves, then weekly until flowering. Borders were sprayed at the first arrival of the beetles. Cucumber beetles were only found in the trap crop and insecticides were applied only to the perimeter trap crop. As a result, 85 percent less insecticide was applied.

In Missouri, a farmer in St. Peters was able to prevent cucumber beetles (*cont. p.3. . .*)



THE IPM CORNER: Using Trap Crops to Minimize Damage to Vegetables by Insect Pests

By Dr. Jaime Piñero, LUCE Integrated Pest Management state specialist

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program at Lincoln University Cooperative Extension in Jefferson City, Missouri is seeking out affordable alternative insect pest management strategies to combat the growing threats to the smallholder's livelihoods in Missouri. One such method is called **trap cropping**.

What are trap crops? Trap crops are plants that are planted next to a higher value crop so as to attract pests as either a food source or oviposition site (where they lay eggs), thus preventing or making less likely the arrival of the pest to the main crop, the cash crop. Insects congregated in trap crops can be more easily attacked by natural enemies and/or killed by insecticides or by other physical means. In other words, trap cropping func-

tions by concentrating and/or killing the pest in the border area, while reducing pest numbers on the unsprayed cash crop. Plant species or cultivar used needs to be more attractive to pest than crop.

Advantages: By using trap crops, farmers can: (1) lessen pesticide use and decrease costs, (2) preserve indigenous natural enemies, (3) improve crop quality, and (4) help conserve the soil and environment.

Tips for successful trap cropping: (1) learn to know and identify the pests and their natural enemies, (2) make a farm plan to guide you on where and when the trap crops will be planted, (3) monitor your plants regularly, (4) immediately control the pests that are found in your trap crop, other-

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from eating his indoor cucumber transplants by using Blue Hubbard planted in pots and placing these outside of his high tunnel. Four potted plants congregated hundreds of beetles while none was found inside the high tunnel. Research led by Dr. Piñero is being conducted in this area for the benefit of Missouri vegetable farmers. Other examples of specific trap crops are presented in the table below:

To control	Use this Trap Crop	Observations
Cucumber beetles	Blue Hubbard squash	Plant Blue Hubbard two weeks before main cucurbit crop, can apply systemic insecticide to kill arriving beetles
Colorado potato beetle	Potato variety Superior (grows well in cool weather)	Plant the trap crop between last year's and this year's fields (near overwintering sites)
Squash bugs	Squash	Main crops: zucchini, watermelon. Can treat the trap crop with an insecticide to control an infestation
Flea beetles	Chinese Southern Giant Mustard (<i>Brassica juncea</i> var. <i>crispifolia</i>)	Main crops: cabbage, broccoli, or cauliflower. Reseeding of the trap crop may be necessary
Diamondback moth	Yellow rocket	Attracts moths, inhibits larval development. Main crops: cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Insecticides may not be needed as natural enemies may control the pest population
European corn borer and fruitworm	Corn (sweet or field)	Main crop: pepper (for European corn borer) and tomato (for fruitworm)

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Grocery stores: This is a market that will demand a lot of product. Before approaching a grocery store it is important to know the structure of the business. Is the store able to make independent buying decisions or are they tied to a regional office and therefore bound to one distributor? Once you find that the grocery store is willing to buy from local growers you can approach either the store manager or the produce manager.

- Know what the wholesale produce price is when you go in. Know what you want to get for your produce and be flexible during negotiations.
- Find out how the grocery store wants you to package your product. Do they want greens individually bunched? How many pounds would they like their tomato cases to be?
- Be consistent with communication and your product delivery, quality and packaging.

Schools: School districts across the state of Missouri are exploring ways to increase student consumption of produce while also supporting their local economies.

- Telephone the school district food service director to gauge interest and request a face-to-face meeting. Have a complete product and price list that includes estimated quantities and dates of availability.

- Children are generally more susceptible to foodborne illnesses so pay extra attention to food safety practices such as product cleanliness, appropriate packaging and chilled transportation.
- Supplying the school salad bar is a good way to get started because it requires smaller volumes of product.

On-line buying clubs: More and more of these groups are popping up in the United States. Some of them are home delivery services and others distribute at an aggregation point. No matter where they distribute, they are all looking for good quality, locally grown produce.

- Clean, consistent packaging is key. Build the cost of packaging into your pricing. If you are certified organic, you need to make sure your packaging fits the protocol.
- These groups are typically more flexible with the timing of delivery and how the produce makes it to their commissary or distribution point. Sometimes they may even pick it up.
- You, as a grower, need to have at least a week's worth of storage on your farm and need to follow the proper post-harvest handling guidelines.

Aggregators: Produce brokers, or aggregators, purchase local product and distribute it to other venues. They sell to a variety of

markets including restaurants, produce stands, hospitals, nursing homes and schools.

- Aggregators buy from both farmers who have excess product after their direct market sales, and farmers who have agreed in advance to grow directly for the aggregator. The causal seller needs only to call the aggregator when excess product is ready to move.
- Time your communication with the aggregator appropriately so that your product makes the supply list that goes out to their buyers.
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) terminal prices are used as guidelines for pricing, which is often tiered based on volume (*cont. p.4. . .*)

Resources:

Post harvest handling decision tool: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/valueaddedag/info/postharvesthandlingdecisiontool.htm>

Containers and Packaging Fruits and Vegetables: http://www.agmrc.org/media/cms/CD1_C07C95889B783.pdf

USDA quality standards for wholesaling: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/standards>

Farm to School: *Local Food Connections: From Farms to Schools* Iowa State University Extension PM 1853a June 2000.

ISFOP

If you are a small farmer and need information, please contact an ISFOP Farm Outreach Worker (FOW). FOWs live and work in your community. They can provide information on ways to better manage your resources, reduce expense and increase income. They can also provide information on other programs and resources that may increase your income and the overall quality of life for your family.

You are eligible to participate if:

- Your family lives on a farm, rural or urban.
- Farm products or income from the farm are necessary for you to live where you do.
- Your family provides the management and most of the labor for your farm.
- Your total annual family income is less than \$50,000.



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and cost of transportation.

Some general tips:

- Approach these wholesale markets in the winter when you are planning your crop calendar, ask them what they want, and plan to plant twice the quantity they are asking for.
- Be consistent with product and communication.
- Remember that most wholesalers are not cash on trade. You may have to wait for about two weeks before receiving payment.

Working with wholesalers takes a different kind of planning and preparation than direct marketing. However, these two markets have one thing in common; you need to cater to the customer. Approach these markets in person rather than on the phone. Just like direct marketing you need to build a personal relationship with your wholesale customer. They want to sell your story along with your produce. Combining wholesaling and retailing can provide you with a more reliable and steady income.

Upcoming Events

- **Goat Workshop:** July 21, 2011, 12:30 p.m.-5 p.m. Raymore, Missouri. **Contact** Jeff Yearington by calling (816) 899-2181 or email YearingtonJ@LincolnU.edu
- **Growing Growers Workshops:** Throughout the year targeted towards vegetable growers. **Call** (816) 305-0362 or **Visit:** www.growinggrowers.org.
- **Accessing Federal Programs and Conservation Practices:** August 18-19, 2011, MU Bradford Research & Extension Center, Columbia, Missouri. **Contact** Debi Kelly by calling (573) 882-1905 or email kellyd@missouri.edu.
- **Kansas City Community Gardens:** Every Friday from 12 p.m.—1:30 p.m. learn growing skills. Kansas City, Missouri. **Call** (816) 931-3877 or **Visit** www.kcg.org/events-workshops.

Save the Date
Minority Landowners Conference
October 28-29, 2011
Jefferson City, Missouri

Meet ISFOP Staff member: Jeff Yearington



Jeff Yearington

Jeff Yearington became a Farm Outreach Worker (FOW) in July, 2009. Yearington has been involved in agriculture his entire life. He grew up on a small farm in Southwest Iowa. His family raised cattle, hogs and crops.

Yearington has an extensive background in raising all types of livestock with goats and vegetables being his specialty. He and his family have marketed goat meat and vegetables in Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri. He has gained valuable experience by selling direct, wholesale and retail. Yearington understands the challenges small farmers face on a day-to-day basis. He is always willing to help farmers overcome obstacles by using new ideas to reach their goals.