

2014-2017 Northeast SARE State Program Project Plan for Cornell University, New York

Project Title: Sparking a Wholesale Revolution: Preparing Small and Mid-Sized Farmers to Enter Larger Markets

PROJECT TOPIC AND JUSTIFICATION OF TRAINING NEED

Over the past 8 years, farmers markets have grown by 38% in the state of New York, the second highest number in the country¹. While this growth has provided an abundance of easy-to-access markets for small and beginning farmers, established farmers have started reporting slower sales and customer loss due to intense competition². These farmers complain of 'burn-out' from investing significant time and energy in direct-marketing strategies that are yielding diminishing returns. Meanwhile, distributors such as food hubs, grocery stores and restaurants are now recruiting product from small to mid-sized farms to meet growing consumer demand for local and sustainably-grown food. Although technically 'wholesalers', these businesses are often eager to establish attentive relationships with their suppliers, offer attractive prices and terms, and maintain a product's branding and integrity³.

New York's small farmers expressed strong interest in exploring these 'new models' of wholesale in a highly detailed marketing trends survey conducted by the Cornell Small Farms Program in February, 2014. Nearly half (39%)of the 445 NY survey takers reported currently selling at farmers markets, farm stands or CSA's, but 25% indicated plans to explore either a food hub or a restaurant over the next 2 years. An additional 7% indicated interest in a grocery store or cooperative. However, respondents identified many questions and perceived risk factors in making a transition to wholesale that need to be addressed⁴. The following farmer quote represents a typical question: "I need to increase my sales to people interested in high quality locally grown products, but cannot afford the time to sit at a farmer's market. Where are the food hubs, and how do I go about providing products?"

In a survey geared toward agricultural service providers titled "Educators: Are you Ready to Help Farmers Sell Wholesale?" conducted by the NY SARE office in May, 2014, 46 educators in NY indicated strong interest in a professional development training to acquire the tools and resources to help farmers decide *if, when and how* to sell to a wholesale market. In addition, 19 signed up for a task group to design curriculum for Wholesale Market Training and 14 signed up to serve on an advisory panel for this project topic.

The 2014-2017 NY SARE PDP program will address this gap in Wholesale Market Training for educators and farmers by facilitating a 3-phase Train-the-Trainer program. The first year of this project will bring a task group of 12 educators together to assess current educational initiatives and generate a teaching curriculum. In YR 2, 36 educators will attend a 2 day workshop to learn, critique, and implement this curriculum. In YR 3, these same educators will work in regional teams of 3 to present the final curriculum to farmers accompanied by either a farmer-buyer networking meeting or field trip to a grocery, restaurant or food hub.

1. See '[One Market Too Many](#)' from the NYS Federation of Farmers Markets; 2. Educator & Farmer Feedback at the annual Small Farms Program Leadership Team Retreat, 2012 & 2013; 3. Faces of Our Food System: Distributer Interviews. Small Farm Quarterly Magazine. [Winter 2012](#); [Spring 2012](#); [Summer 2012](#); [Winter 2012](#). See also 'Wholesale Markets: Farmer Profiles' found at [SF Summit Pages](#). 4. See 'Where do YOU sell? Marketing Trends Survey' Results at [SF Summit Pages](#)

5. BENEFICIARY AUDIENCE DESCRIPTION and RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Beneficiaries

12 educators will be invited to design and develop Wholesale Market Training curriculum. 36 educators will be invited to attend a 2-day workshop to learn, critique, and implement this curriculum. The program is open to any agricultural educator in NY including Cooperative Extension, USDA, ag economic development specialists, non-profits, and farmer teachers.

Recruitment Efforts

Educators that indicated interest in the "Educators: Are you Ready to Help Farmers Sell Wholesale?" survey will receive the first round of invitations followed by a general recruitment announcement to the Cornell Small Farms mailing list of 6000.

3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing the "Wholesale Revolution" Training Program, educators will improve their knowledge and skills to:

- Identify specific wholesale entrepreneurs buying local product from small and mid-size farms in their regions.
- Facilitate and support communications between wholesale buyers and potential farmer suppliers about product demand, storage, transportation, packaging, certifications, liability, etc.
- Help small and mid-size farmers carefully assess the benefits and challenges of these new wholesale markets to ensure sound marketing decisions.
- Help farmers assess changes needed in production, storage, packaging and handling to satisfy larger markets.

4. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES PLANNED

- In YR 1, an introductory series of 3 'Wholesale Revolution' webinars will attract publicity to the project. Led by farmers and wholesale entrepreneurs, each will focus on a specific market, i.e. "Getting Your Product into Grocery Stores" or "Is a Food Hub Right for You?" An opening slide will describe the project briefly and invite viewers to sign up for a project list-serve that will be used to announce subsequent opportunities.
- In YR 1, a task group of 12 educators will meet via an introductory webinar followed by an in-person writing retreat to assess current educational initiatives and generate a teaching curriculum. Wikis and 'group space' will be used to house dynamic content, ideas & materials.
- In YR 2, 36 educators will attend a one day workshop to learn, critique, and implement this curriculum. An optional second day bus tour will bring educators to food hubs, restaurants, and grocery stores to meet with wholesale entrepreneurs and tour facilities.
- In YR 3, these same educators will work in groups of 3 to present the final Wholesale Market Training curriculum to a total of 120 farmers in regional full day workshops. In the morning session of this workshop, farmers will be coached through a decision framework to clarify market goals and prompted to assess changes needed in production, storage, packaging and handling to satisfy market goals. Afternoon sessions will feature either a farmer-buyer networking meeting or field trip. Educators will work with wholesale entrepreneurs in advance to ensure they provide detailed information about what farmers need to know to make these sessions optimally productive (i.e. type of products sought, seasonal demand, transportation, storage facilities, packaging requirements, certifications needed, liability issues and food safety).
- See milestones for more details.

SEE ATTACHED MILESTONES FOR YEARS 1, 2 & 3

VERIFICATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Educators that attend workshops to learn, critique, and implement Wholesale Market Training curriculum will be evaluated before and immediately after the workshop to assess understanding of learning outcomes listed in Box 3. These same educators will be evaluated again after they have presented the final curriculum to farmers in a regional full day workshop.

1a. FARMER ACTIONS DESIRED

40 farmers will enter a new wholesale market within 1 year of a Wholesale Market Training. 20 of these farmers will report higher level of satisfaction in 3 of the following 5 areas:

- PROFIT earned through this new channel LABOR required to sell through this new channel
- VOLUME of PRODUCT required to send through this new channel
- LIFESTYLE PREFERENCES that selling through this new channel provides
- RISK specific to selling through this new channel
- ASSOCIATED COSTS required to sell through this new channel

1b. INDICATORS OF FARMER ACTIONS

- Number of farmers using newly acquired decision aids to decide not to enter a wholesale market
- Number of farmers assessing changes needed in production, storage, packaging and handling to prepare to enter larger markets.
- Number of farmers entering a wholesale market
- Number of farmers reporting higher level of satisfaction in 4 of the above 8 areas

VERIFICATION OF FARMER ACTIONS (optional)

- Educators will distribute a pre-workshop survey to farmers asking them to rate level of satisfaction with profit, labor, volume of product, lifestyle, risk, and associated costs in their current market channels.
- If this SARE PDP project continues beyond 3 years, this same survey will be emailed to farmers within 1 year of the Workshop. Farmers that have entered new markets will be asked to rank the same factors above for their new channel. Farmers that have not entered a new market will be asked to identify any remaining questions, perceived risks or other factors that remain barriers.
- An evaluation given immediately after the Wholesale Market Training workshop will assess level of understanding of decision aids and factors relevant to market decision making.

2a. AG SERVICE PROVIDER ACTIONS

PROJECT PERFORMANCE TARGET

36 agriculture service providers who gain competency in wholesale market readiness curriculum will work in teams of 3 to teach 12 workshops to 120 small and mid-size farmers interested in pursuing wholesale markets.

2b. INDICATORS OF AG SERVICE PROVIDER ACTIONS

- Number and type of ag service providers who generate a teaching curriculum
- Number and type of ag service providers who deliver Wholesale Market Trainings
- The number of farmers they teach

VERIFICATION OF PERFORMANCE TARGET

- The NY NESARE PDP program will work closely with the 12 teams of educators as they prepare to implement this curriculum in Wholesale Market Training workshops in their regions. The project coordinator will assist with press, program design, and identifying wholesale entrepreneurs.
- Interviews will be conducted with selected educators at the end of the project to assess the effectiveness of the overall educational approach and support from the NESARE office.