



Profile from the Field

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Development of a Cooperative Food Distribution Model for Small Farms

Project Titles: Development of a Cooperative Food Distribution Model for Small Farms

Coordinators: Monica Bongue

Location: Wooster, Ohio

SARE Grants: \$22,500

Duration: 2013-2014

To read the full project reports, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for project number FNC13-899.

Monica Bongue owns Muddy Fork Farm in Wooster Ohio, a certified organic farm for over 15 years, where she produces vegetables, chickens, ducks, sheep, and goats. She wanted to expand her marketing which consisted of direct sales through farmers' markets and a small, on farm CSA. Along with a number of other small, local producers, Bongue received a \$22,500 NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant to develop a cooperative food distribution system to connect small growers in her rural area to consumers in nearby urban areas.

“In our rural communities people who care about local food choices have their own gardens, or go to farm stands or local farmer's markets,” explained Bongue. “Specialty produce growers can produce a lot more food than there is a market for in the community, so it is important to reach to the urban markets. It is possible to do one or two city markets as independent farmers, but a collaborative effort can help reach more of the urban market with less work and more efficiency of production.”

In 2013, the group established a trial CSA with a target market of Cleveland and Akron. They eventually grew into Farm Roots, a multi-farm cooperative that aggregated produce at Local Roots Market and Cafe, where they could package and distribute their CSA shares. They built a relationship with the J. M. Smucker

Corporation, and created a CSA program for 45 of the company's employees. They even set up a program that allowed customers to donate CSA shares to People to People Ministries, a local food bank.

Four years after the grant project was completed, in 2017, Farm Roots dissolved due to organizational and personnel changes. They transferred their remaining funds to a non-profit, A Whole Community Inc., which is continuing some of the community food work that was important to Farm Roots. Bongue continues to direct market her produce at Muddy Fork Farm.

For more information on Bongue's NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant project, visit the SARE project reporting website. Simply search by the project number, FNC13-899, at www.mysare.sare.org, or contact the NCR-SARE office.

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