



Profile from the Field

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Scaling Up Specialty Dairy in Ohio's Appalachian Region

Project Title: Creating an Educational and Economic Value Chain for Specialty Dairy Products in Appalachian Ohio

Coordinator: Tom Redfern

Location: The Plains, Ohio

SARE Grant \$: \$165,500

Duration: 2016-2019

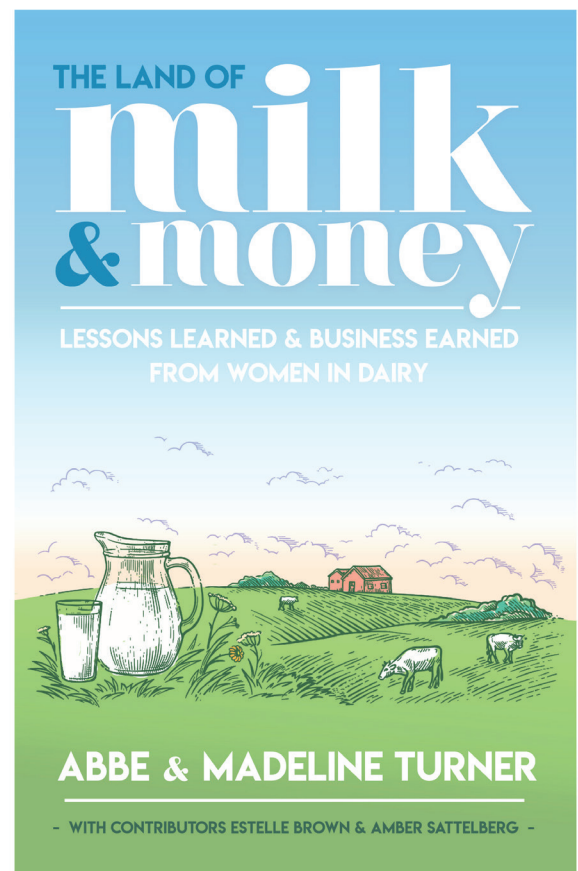
To read the full project reports, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for project number LNC16-384

The beautiful vistas of Ohio's Appalachian region delight visitors with ancient forested foothills, winding creeks, and unglaciated terrain. In the late 19th century, extraction industries like the coal industry also discovered value in this landscape, but as coal resources declined, local economies deteriorated. Today, scaling up local foods is one way these historic communities are strengthening their agricultural roots and regional economies.

"The topography of Appalachia Ohio has resulted in fragmented tracts of farms with varying degrees of soil types, which has proved suitable for small scale livestock farmers," said Tom Redfern, Director of Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry at Rural Action, a community organization in rural Ohio. "Being attentive to our place-based assets and generational agricultural practices has encouraged remaking our smallholdings and a diversified approach into a more sustainable model that builds resilience."

With their land, their community, and smallscale livestock in mind, Rural Action and a group of community members received a \$165,500 NCR-SARE Research and Education grant to do research and education about specialty dairy products. They had evidence that suggested there was an unmet demand for locally-made products like cheese and soap. Products like these could be made with milk from small-scale livestock, which are well-suited to their landscape. The team set out to bring attention to small dairy opportunities with local producers and food entrepreneurs.

Rural Action staff members, Becky Rondy with Green Edge Organic Gardens, and Leslie Schaller with the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet) worked with area dairy producers to gather information



Resources like Abbe and Madeline Turner's book about 17 women dairy producers is just one of the many resources developed by and for small-scale dairy producers by a project team in Ohio. Find them online at https://projects.sare.org/sare_project/lnc16-384/.

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and develop a training program. Four specialty dairy producers (Krista Duval of Creekside Farms, Michelle Gorman of Integration Acres, Abbe Turner of Lucky Penny Farms, and Annie Warmke of Blue Rock Station) received training on using the materials.

These four women hit the road to meet with producers across the region, with resources in one hand and their expertise in the other. Their peer-to-peer workshops, webinars, and podcasts focused on specialty dairy operating models, regulatory compliance, and improving profitability. In total, they reached 220 producers, specifically women and limited resource producers.

One of the workshop instructors, Krista Duval, is a cheesemaker in Athens, Ohio. She made goat milk soap with workshop attendees, showcasing it as a scalable specialty product for people not interested or ready to start a creamery. Related to her experiences with the workshop, Duval developed a *Goat Milk Soap Making Manual*. Another workshop leader created a publication as well. Abbe Turner operates a creamery in Kent, Ohio. Inspired by the cadre of women-led dairies in Ohio, Turner and her daughter, Madeline, worked together on a book in conjunction with the grant. *The Land of Milk and Money* features 17 successful women dairy producers in Ohio. In addition to providing book inspiration and business information, the workshops raised awareness about supporting small, local producers. Both Duval and Turner gained new customers through their workshop interactions.

“It’s hard for small producers to compete, our methods are slower,” said Turner. “Organizations like Rural Action and ACEnet provide the necessary support that producers need. They’re critical for building infrastructure in communities.”

Rural Action said changes would be gradual as new markets open and producers scale up. They will track the long-term impacts of the project using statewide market reports and monitor producers’ activities in the region. Throughout the course of the project, the specialty dairy project team authored 2 books (right), developed 18 print resources, recorded 9 podcasts, and held 2



Goat Milk Soap Making Manual



Resources like Krista Duval’s 38-page goat milk soap making booklet is just one of the many resources developed by and for small-scale dairy producers by a project team in Ohio. Find them online at https://projects.sare.org/sare_project/lnc16-384/.

on-farm demonstrations, 8 online trainings, and 3 webinars. You can access many of the materials associated with this project on the SARE reporting site at <https://projects.sare.org/LNC16-384/> or contact the NCR-SARE office for more information.

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