

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE RELATED POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO BENEFIT LIMITED RESOURCE FARMERS

*A report of the Community Food Security Coalition's
Food Policy Council Program*



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Published in 2007 by the Community Food Security Coalition
P.O. Box 209, Venice, CA 90294
<http://www.foodsecurity.org>

The Community Food Security Coalition wishes to thank the following for their assistance in preparing this report and/or reviewing drafts: Rodger Cooley, Andy Fisher, Hugh Joseph, Debra Livingston, Tony Machacha, Rebecca Nemeč, Keith Richards, and Monika Roth. Special thanks to our funder, the USDA Risk Management Agency.

RMA *Community Outreach & Assistance Partnership Program*

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Part One: An Overview of State and Local Policy Approaches

INTRODUCTION

Family farming is an important part of America's history and identity. Family-scale farms provide many benefits to society, which include producing high-quality foods, strengthening the fabric of rural communities, and supporting local businesses and circulating wealth in the community. So, it is no surprise that numerous polls document strong and growing consumer interest in buying from local, sustainable, and/or family farmers. This interest also is demonstrated by rapid growth in farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, farm-to-school programs, and similar initiatives. For example, the number of active farmers' markets in the US has nearly doubled in the last 10 years.¹

However, despite this strong consumer support, family farmers face structural obstacles that make it very difficult to earn a living from farming. These obstacles include a lack of regional distribution and processing infrastructure and stagnant prices for their crops despite significant increases in input costs. While federal agriculture policy could help address these obstacles and level the playing field for family farms, all too often it does just the opposite. This imbalance in policy has contributed to many problems in the farm and food system, including overproduction of certain crops, degradation of natural resources, the decline of rural communities, and the obesity epidemic. Increasing policy support for family-scale farmers offers significant potential to help address these problems and to develop a food system that better meets the needs of farmers and consumers alike.

As part of broader policies aimed at supporting the viability of independent and family farmers, it is important to consider the particular needs of farmers and ranchers with limited resources. These producers, especially those from particular ethnic groups, too often have been underserved or denied equal access to programs and

resources that could help them succeed. Also, there are a significant number of immigrants and refugees who are now working as farm laborers in the US. Many of them were farmers in their homelands and are interested in becoming independent farmers in their new country. Given the steady drop in the number of farms in the US and the high average age of remaining farmers, it is important to encourage those who are willing to assume the risks and rewards of farming and to make this essential business more economically viable.

All these trends create a range of needs and opportunities to develop policy approaches that support the viability of independent farmers, including limited resource producers. While there is some tendency to expect the federal government to take the lead in this arena, the responsibility is shared across various levels of government, and in many cases, there is more room for creative policy approaches at the local and state levels. Expanding policy support for limited resource producers could help strengthen other initiatives designed to improve access to fresh foods and/or increase the economic viability of small-scale farming, such as "buy local" campaigns, farmers' markets, farm-to-cafeteria programs, and other institutional food procurement initiatives. These policies and programs could be crafted to help promote full access by women, people of color, immigrants and refugees, farmworkers transitioning to independent farming, and other marginalized producers. Integrating and strengthening these types of initiatives could create positive ripple effects that go far beyond the producers served and that help states meet other important policy objectives related to public health, economic development, and environmental protection.

¹ <http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/FarmersMarketGrowth.htm>

This study has four objectives:

1. To review existing state and local food and agricultural policies aimed at creating increased market opportunities for local producers in general and limited resource producers in particular;
2. To offer recommendations for additional state and local policies for disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
3. To provide an overview of effective and innovative approaches towards limited resource producers created and implemented by non-governmental organizations;
4. To identify appropriate roles for Food Policy Councils in strengthening opportunities for limited resource producers to contribute to state and local food systems.

Part One of this report provides an introduction to the issues, an overview of the context for state and local government policies influencing limited resource producers, and general policy recommendations. Part Two provides examples of 36 state and local government policies and practices to develop (mostly indirectly) market opportunities for disadvantaged farmers, along with some approaches to improve their capacity to produce food for markets. Lastly, Part Three gives an overview of related efforts by non-governmental organizations who work most closely with women, people of color, recent immigrants, and other socially disadvantaged producers.

This study was conducted by staff and consultants of the Community Food Security Coalition between July and November of 2006. It began with a survey of recent state-level legislation and executive orders focused on supporting farmers through various forms of direct purchasing: “buy local” campaigns, farm-to-school programs, farmers’ market support, and food purchases by state agencies and institutions. A number of interviews were conducted with individuals outside of government having direct experience with limited resource farmers. The role of Food Policy Councils in supporting limited resource producers was explored through a conference call with 30 participants in September 2006 and a Fall 2006 survey of Food Policy Councils with 28 respondents. While the authors have gone to great effort to ensure the accuracy of the information provided here,

some of this information may have changed since the research was conducted, and we cannot guarantee its accuracy.

What exactly is a **limited resource producer**? The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service defines a “limited resource farmer” as having both of the following characteristics:

- Gross farm sales not more than \$113,600 in each of the previous two years, and;
- Total household net income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four; or less than 80 percent of the county median household income in each of the previous two years.

The broader term, “limited resource producers,” adds ranchers to the above definition. In this report, we use the term “limited resource producers” as shorthand to refer to diverse types of farmers and ranchers that are the focus of the USDA Risk Management Agency’s outreach programs and this report: women, people of color, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and other traditionally underserved groups.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR POLICIES AFFECTING LIMITED RESOURCE PRODUCERS

US government support for farmers is overwhelmingly focused on a few commodity grain crops, with the lion’s share of farm payments going to a small number of wealthy farmers and businesses.² Most farmers have limited resources and receive little or no support from federal agriculture programs. Indeed, they may have been underserved or even excluded from these programs, federal and private lending programs, or sources of technical assistance, especially if they are people of color or members of other “socially disadvantaged” groups.

² http://www.mulchblog.com/2007/06/full_disclosure_who_really_ben.php

In response to critiques of these inequities, the federal government, through USDA,³ has established some small-scale policy initiatives aimed at limited resource farmers and ranchers. The Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program (funded under Section 2501 of the 2002 Farm Bill) provides opportunities to acquire, operate, and retain farms and ranches, and facilitates participation in all USDA programs.⁴ In addition, the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA), through its mission to promote market-based risk management strategies and practices, supports limited resource producers with several programs. In 2006, RMA established 62 Outreach Partnership Agreements with non-governmental organizations in 28 states; these agreements, involving \$7.1 million in total funding, supported a variety of outreach and training opportunities.⁵

Limited resource producers also benefit from cost-sharing actions under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. This voluntary conservation program provides farmers and ranchers with technical and financial assistance to improve their environmental stewardship, with higher benefit levels for limited resource producers.⁶ They also have benefited from the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, a competitive grant program that funds research and outreach projects, including direct grants to producers.⁷

While these USDA programs provide significant benefits to participating low-income farmers and ranchers, their relatively small appropriations (only \$5.9 million annually for the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program) represent a minute fragment of the total amount that USDA annually directs toward US farmers. Programs specifically supporting limited resource farmers are not a traditional focus for USDA, and some were established only after litigation prompted by a legacy of discrimination. And yet, even with these and other USDA programs in place, the number of socially disadvantaged producers served is still disproportionately low.

As we prepare to go to press, the Farm and Food Policy Project, a major campaign involving hundreds of organizations, has been working to win significant reforms in the next Farm Bill. They have advocated for expanding the small programs that serve limited resource producers and for many other changes to support sustainable, family-scale farming and to improve access to healthy foods, which would benefit both consumers and limited resource producers. While winning major reforms in the Farm Bill is a massive, long-term undertaking, some of their key proposals have been included in draft bills, and they have had a significant impact on the debate. The campaign also has helped build unprecedented public support for major reform of the Farm Bill, which will likely lead to additional policy changes in the future.

The changing dynamics of farming in the US are another important piece of the national context for policy support to limited resource farmers. The number of farms in the US has been declining for decades. According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, there was an increase in the number of farms in just two categories of farm size between 1997 and 2002: those over 2,000 acres (a five percent increase) and those between 10 and 49 acres (a six percent increase). And, while the total number of entry-level farmers decreased, farmers of color were a growing percentage of the total. The number of Hispanic farmers, for example, increased 50 percent between 1997 and 2002. Across the US, the face of farming is changing, with more farms being operated by new immigrants who bring their own production practices and cultural characteristics to local agriculture. These changes on the ground mean that changes in policy are needed to help these diverse producers become economically self-sustaining and contribute to their communities.

³ In addition to USDA, immigrant farmers receive federal support through the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services.

⁴ http://www.csrees.usda.gov/funding/outreach/outreach_synopsis.html (All websites cited were accessed during October 2006).

⁵ <http://www.rma.usda.gov/news/2006/09/outreach.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip>

⁷ <http://www.sare.org/index.htm>

THE STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT FOR POLICY SUPPORT FOR LIMITED RESOURCE PRODUCERS

As at the federal level, there is little state or local government policy specifically aimed at creating market opportunities for low-resource farmers. Yet limited resource farmers do benefit from a number of state-level, on-the-ground programs, many targeted at small-scale producers in general and/or operated through university extension outreach. Part Two of this report highlights a number of examples.

As in any area in which public policy lags behind the need for such policies, there are obstacles to the creation of state and local policies aimed at building market opportunities for disadvantaged producers. State and local governments generally are not proactive in advance of a policy issue, instead reacting to certain issues once they have emerged. This pattern typically depends on advocacy efforts by individuals and interest groups outside of government. Issues that fall within the broad umbrella of community food security, such as farmers' markets, food banks, urban agriculture and community gardens, and family farming, each have constituencies that track policy actions related to their areas of interest.

This also is the case with limited resource producers. Today, a number of accomplished organizations advocate on their behalf, either through policy recommendations (such as the Rural Coalition's Farm Bill advocacy) or through direct work with constituents (such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives' efforts to help African-American farmers take advantage of federal opportunities like the USDA Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program).

The support of non-governmental organizations is particularly important to disadvantaged farmers and farmworkers. Like other marginalized social groups, they face additional challenges to acquiring the resources and knowledge needed to become a strong political constituency. In the case of immigrant farmers, for example,

there are language barriers and sometimes a misunderstanding of the concepts underlying government support and assistance. There may also be a reluctance to deal with government agencies born out of prior negative experiences in a farmer's country of origin. Additionally, because of past discrimination (or fear of future discrimination), there is a tendency for limited resource and/or ethnic farmers to shy away from government programs.

There also are broader obstacles. For example, the wider debate on immigration in the US provides a difficult context in which to advance policies that support immigrant and refugee farmers. From a fiscal perspective, enough state and local governments are themselves operating from a lowered resource base, which makes it more difficult to appropriate funds for any new programs, including those for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Still, despite these obstacles, it is possible that this could be an emerging policy area through which state and local governments could identify market alternatives to commodity growing and large-scale agricultural production that would benefit all small farmers, and disadvantaged ones in particular.

One important venue for advancing these policies is offered by local, state, and regional Food Policy Councils. They include representatives of a wide range of organizations and agencies, and usually have a broad focus on improving food and agricultural systems. Currently, most of these councils have little direct involvement with limited resource farmers. However, a 2006 survey of Food Policy Councils by the Community Food Security Coalition found that a large majority of respondents, almost 90 percent, expressed interest in developing market opportunities for local farmers. Such efforts could include or even target limited resource and disadvantaged producers.

CURRENT APPROACHES TO SUPPORT LIMITED RESOURCE PRODUCERS THROUGH STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Currently, the activities of state and local governments in support of limited resource producers are largely indirect. For example, state departments of agriculture may partner with non-governmental organizations to implement programs that directly benefit low-income, minority, and beginning farmers. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets was an initial partner in the innovative New Farmer Development Project. In collaboration with the Greenmarket Program of the quasi-public Council on the Environment of New York City and the extension programs of Cornell and Rutgers Universities, the state helped to develop market opportunities for immigrant farmers by creating new farmers' markets in ethnic neighborhoods of New York City.

Many state agency actions emerge from laws and funding that are decided by the legislative branch of state government. However, many other creative ideas to strengthen local agriculture don't make it through the legislative process, whether due to political compromise, other priorities, a discomfort with innovation or "fringe ideas," or a perceived threat to established agriculture interests.

The following is a general introduction to the practical approaches described in more detail in Parts Two and Three of this report:

Land, Capital, and Resource Access Programs. A defining characteristic of US agriculture is that it is difficult for farmers to survive economically without some outside support mechanisms related to access to capital and land, infrastructure, and risk management. States can supplement federal policies in these areas to help ensure that farmers can access the resources they need to be successful.

Access to farmland is obviously important to beginning farmers, and connects with the issue of farmland preservation, especially for high-value land near cities. The rapid loss of agricultural land to suburban development is a nationwide problem, and in the long term should be addressed through land use planning. In the shorter term, state and local governments still have a responsibility to address development needs while also maintaining opportunities for local food production. How can this balance be achieved, while also incorporating limited resource farmers into the mix? When outright purchase of land is not an option, there are still ways for new and immigrant farmers to gain access to land. One is for an organization to own or lease a parcel and make it available to participants as part of a farmer support program. In terms of acquiring operating capital, there are significant barriers keeping low-resource farmers and ranchers from receiving loans and grants. These can include a general unawareness of available support programs, a perceived lack of eligibility for programs seen as benefiting conventional farmers, and an inability to meet qualifications such as supplying past farm records. Several programs cited in Part Three of this report help limited resource applicants develop the skills and comfort levels needed to successfully apply for loans and grants.

Extension Outreach. There are several reasons why outreach by state extension offices based in public land grant universities can be an appropriate way to create market opportunities for limited resource producers. First, by doing this work, extension offices are continuing their historic role (practiced since the 19th century) of transferring the knowledge and experience generated by a state-funded university to the people of that state. Secondly, extension agents may work closely on the ground with their clients, thus becoming acquainted with their needs and assets. For example, in areas where limited resource and ethnic farmers are transitioning from conventional to more sustainable farming practices, they can tailor projects to help these farmers compete in the marketplace. Extension outreach can strengthen farmers' ability to produce for a market, and also help build market demand for the products by promoting the nutritional advantages of fresh local produce.

In practice, however, while there are noteworthy examples of extension outreach to limited resource and disadvantaged producers, their potential role is limited by shrinking budgets and by the varied levels of interest and ability to do such work among individual extension agents. Many do not have the knowledge base or the cultural competency to effectively work with ethnic producers and transitioning farm workers. These factors, combined with existing language and cultural barriers, may result in some groups of farmers being overlooked and underserved by their local extension agents.

Executive Agency Actions. State and local departments of agriculture, public health, education, community/economic development, etc. carry out the directives of an executive (governor or mayor) or legislative body. The decentralization of government in the United States allows for these agencies to operate within frameworks developed at the federal level (by, for example, USDA), but also to develop policies focused on advancing food production, marketing, and distribution in an individual state. Some sort of state governmental sanction, for example, typically supports the various state “buy local” campaigns across the US.

Agency and Institutional Food Purchasing. Individual states, through public agency and institutional procurement, are important purchasers of food. In the past several years, an increasing number of policy actions have been taken to encourage them to purchase agricultural products grown locally or within their state. Limited resource producers are in theory eligible to bid on public contracts, but they may lack the capacity to develop a successful bid and could benefit from assistance with understanding procurement procedures, identifying appropriate institutional markets, and/or crafting policies encouraging purchase of food from limited resource producers.

Farm-to-School Programs. One type of innovative institutional food purchasing program that is rapidly expanding across the US is the farm-to-school model. These programs are very appealing because they address three food system issues simultaneously: 1) improving access to fresh, nutritious foods for schoolchildren; 2) increasing

the viability of local (and sometimes also sustainable) farming; and 3) providing educational opportunities that increase students’ awareness of food sources and promote healthier food choices. Farm-to-school programs offer potential market opportunities for limited resource producers, especially if appropriate support is available for them.

Government Support for Food Policy Councils. Food Policy Councils (FPCs) are often more effective at the state/local government level if: 1) they are officially sanctioned through executive order, legislative resolution, or some other action; and/or 2) their membership includes and is closely linked with those in government who are positioned to affect state or local food policies. FPCs also are a mechanism for bringing people together from inside and outside of government to work on food and farm policy. In terms of support for limited resource producers, FPCs have the potential to see them as part of a larger food system and create or expand linkages to help disadvantaged farmers to access farmers markets, “buy local” initiatives, farm-to-school and other procurement programs, and the like.

RECOMMENDED POLICY APPROACHES

State and local governments have an important potential role to play in addressing the needs of limited resource producers. The very existence of disadvantaged producers is partly due to past and current governmental policies, along with broader patterns of discrimination. The impacts of these policies on thousands of farmers, their communities, and society as a whole are still not widely recognized. The issues facing immigrant farmers are part of broader conditions affecting new Americans in general and indeed all Americans. So, the time is right to review the collection of policies and practices described in this study and to use this analysis to identify opportunities to support limited resource producers, and to recommend a more proactive and integrated approach for state and local governments in this arena.

An important initial step would be to **identify the distinctions between various categories of limited resource producers and the implications for agriculture policy and programs.**⁸ For example, the term “limited resource producer” can encompass ethnic and immigrant farmers with very few material resources, as well as land-rich white farmers who at one time made a good living but now struggle to make ends meet. And the language barriers faced by immigrant and refugee farmers are important to address in providing technical assistance, loans, and grants.

Secondly, advocates should **emphasize the linkages between supporting limited resource farmers and widely shared goals and values.** Maintaining the viability of small-scale agriculture and rural economies provides many public benefits, including wider access to fresh foods, more cohesive rural communities, and more diversified control of the food system. It is important to articulate how assisting disadvantaged farmers contributes to these broader goals. Those now working on the ground with limited resource producers can link these goals in their work to advance “buy local” campaigns, farm-to-cafeteria efforts and other institutional procurement plans, farmers’ markets, and organic farming.

A third step would be to **increase funding from state and local governments to non-governmental organizations** who work directly with limited resource producers, as described in Part Three of this report. This would build on successful programs developed by organizations that are closely connected with their target audience and have the capacity to deliver services that meet their needs. It would resemble the type of public support given to university extension and could complement the work being done by extension.

A fourth step would be to **enhance the production and distribution infrastructure for small farmers** in general, which also would improve the operating context for limited resource producers. In many areas, the lack of such infrastructure prevents local producers from being able to respond to strong consumer interest in buying locally grown products. Addressing this bottleneck could

stimulate local economic development and provide a win-win-win situation for farmers, consumers, and communities. Specific infrastructure elements could include packing and processing facilities (for produce, grains, and livestock), distribution systems that reduce costs and energy use (for example by pooling products from multiple local sources) and marketing (through cooperatives and direct outlets such as farmers’ markets and farm-to-school).

Finally, **state and local Food Policy Councils should play a more significant role** in supporting limited resource producers. Why? First, Food Policy Councils are created to take a broad perspective and address issues that link with many interacting dimensions of a state or local food system. Secondly, Food Policy Councils ideally speak for all voices in the food system, producers and consumers alike. Third, depending on their connection to state or local government, Food Policy Councils may be positioned to effectively advocate for appropriate policies based on both their knowledge of local conditions and their awareness of relevant policies and practices occurring elsewhere. Finally, an FPC can articulate to the public how the local food system connects with other issues, such as land use or job creation, and identify integrated ways to address these issues. Working to protect farmland threatened by suburban development to facilitate sustainable farming in close proximity to urban consumers is a good example of an appropriate approach for an FPC.

The situation of limited resource producers described here is rooted in the larger national problem of maintaining the economic viability of small-scale farming. This requires changing policies and institutions that have created a very uneven playing field benefiting large-scale producers and the companies that buy artificially cheap commodity crops. Yet it also stands as a separate issue, in that it involves Native Americans, African Americans, Latin Americans, Asian Americans, women, and other groups of people who have been underserved by many government agriculture programs and have been the target of broader discrimination. Addressing these imbal-

⁸ It should be noted that the act of classifying sub-groups of limited resource producers is itself problematic in its potential for labeling individuals and setting them apart.

ances and ensuring that all people are treated fairly can't be achieved through policy alone, but policy and public institutions have a very important role to play. We hope that the ideas in this report can aid state and local policy-makers and advocates for limited resource producers in crafting appropriate policies that create new markets for sustainable, locally grown food products while allowing full access to these markets for all.

Part Two:

Examples of Supportive State and Local Government Policies and Practices

The following is a representative sampling of recent state and local government policies and practices with potential for creating new market opportunities for local farmers. As explained in Part One, while limited resource producers typically are not the explicit focus of these initiatives, in most cases they should be able to benefit from these policies and programs. The approaches described below also could serve as starting points for state or local jurisdictions seeking to develop policies specifically targeted at limited resource producers.

Some state and local initiatives create new markets for locally produced food, for example by establishing new farmers' markets or developing farm-to-school or other institutional purchasing programs. Others strengthen farmers' capacity to produce for markets, for example through a risk management training to help them address the economic uncertainties of small-scale farming.

Individual states generally are free to set their own farm and food policies as a supplement or complement to federal initiatives, or to fill in gaps in federal farm and food policy. The state and local policy activities listed here are not all completely independent of the federal government, since some are funded in part or entirely by the USDA, particularly those involving university extension outreach.

Much of the information on state policies included here was drawn from the Healthy Community Design Legislation Database of the National Conference of State Legislatures (http://www.ncsl.org/programs/environ/healthyCommunity/healthycommunity_bills.cfm). This database was accessed for this report in August of 2006, and the status of some of these policies may have changed since that time. Readers may wish to consult the NCSL database to learn about more recent state-level activity.

1) POLICIES AND PRACTICES EXECUTED THROUGH UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

The extension services of state land-grant universities can potentially be significant actors in helping limited resource producers to access information and resources that can support their success. In some cases, agents work closely with and know the special needs of their clients, and can leverage both university-generated knowledge and their working relationships with state agencies to create innovative and effective programs. Extension outreach can operate with either a statewide focus (see the Kentucky example below) or a local focus (see Montana, New Mexico, and New York examples).

Iowa

LEOPOLD CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

<http://www.leopold.iastate.edu>¹

Iowa's 1987 Groundwater Protection Act established the Leopold Center at Iowa State University to conduct and sponsor research on the negative environmental effects of agricultural practices in Iowa, and to build the foundation

¹ Websites cited were initially accessed during October 2006 and confirmed or updated in September 2007.

for more sustainable farming practices. While not the state's university extension center (which also is based at Iowa State), the Leopold Center annually distributes grants to state researchers to conduct studies on aspects of the state's food system and agricultural business with practical applications. One 2006 grantee will assess the entrepreneurial needs of immigrant farmers in Carroll County in cooperation with a similar project in Marshall County.

Kentucky

'THIRD THURSDAY THING' SERIES OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE WORKSHOPS

http://www.kysu.edu/land_grant/coop_extension_program/agriculture_natural_resources/small_farms.cfm

Limited resource farmers are among the many who regularly participate in the popular series of demonstration events on sustainable agriculture held by the land-grant Kentucky State University, funded by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SARE) program. Extension agents who have attended the trainings pass on what they've learned to limited resource farmers. The series is being replicated by Tennessee State University.

Massachusetts

FARMING FOR ETHNIC MARKETS

http://www.umassvegetable.org/growers_services/farming_ethnic_markets/index.html

University of Massachusetts Extension has recognized the importance of immigrants as a source of the state's future farmers and as an expanding market for farm products. It has produced fact sheets on farm management and business practices in a number of languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Khmer, Hmong, and Vietnamese), and posters on pest management heavy on photographs and light on English wording.

Montana

COOPERATIVE BEEF PROCESSING ON THE FLATHEAD RESERVATION

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/pub/jan05/help.htm>

A member of the Salish tribe, who is also the Montana State University Extension agent for the Flathead Reservation, was instrumental in helping several tribes form the Flathead Native Agricultural Cooperative. The coop includes Salish, Kootenai, and Pend O'Reille tribal members, and was supported by a USDA Rural Development Value Added Producer Grant. An old tribal recipe was used to produce Crooked Bow brand smoked beef strips from grass-fed beef, a value-added product that was successfully sold at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. The cooperative uses the kitchen and processing facilities of a nearby non-profit cooperative development center.

New Mexico

STATE ASSISTANCE TO A NEW WHEAT GROWING COOPERATIVE (1995)

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/pub/may05/going.htm>

Representatives of New Mexico State University Extension and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (through a SARE grant) helped a group of 30 primarily Latino and Native farmers in Taos County form a producer cooperative. The Sangre de Cristo Agricultural Producers Cooperative has since grown, processed, and successfully marketed a brand of premium, high-protein wheat flour under the "Nativo" brand. Extension taught the farmers techniques for growing the unfamiliar type of wheat; the Department of Agriculture helped the cooperative form and apply for grants to acquire equipment; and the state legislature has provided a total of \$50,000 for operating costs. Navio Flour is sold in upscale outlets in Taos and Santa Fe.

New York

ALTERNATIVE FORAGE TO CORN SILAGE

http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/administration/program/impacts/CCE_Top_Tier_02.pdf [download]

Cornell Cooperative Extension Rensselaer County helped identify and promote Brown Mid Rib (BMR) sorghum-Sudan as a less expensive alternative to traditional corn silage for livestock, which is more costly to small and limited resource farmers, partly due to the need for specialized planting equipment. The planting of BMR sorghum-Sudan over corn silage was particularly valuable during a 2002 drought in upstate New York.

North Carolina

EXTENSION SUPPORT FOR SMALL-SCALE, PASTURE-FED HOG FARMING

African-American farmers are the primary beneficiaries of a program assisting small farmers in raising pasture-fed hogs – an alternative to the corporate factory hog raising that dominates the national market. The program was started through North Carolina A&T University Cooperative Extension in partnership with Heifer International. A SARE grant helped them develop the pasture-based system of hog raising.

2) POLICIES AND PRACTICES EXECUTED THROUGH STATE AGENCIES

State executive agencies (e.g. agriculture, education, transportation, etc.) implement policies set by legislatures as laws and by governors as executive orders. In several cases, state agencies are direct conduits for public grants to food producers. In others, tax incentives are available to support food system initiatives or entrepreneurial actions. The following examples are not as specifically oriented to limited resource producers as the extension examples in Section One. In theory, however, the approaches they represent can be used or adapted to create greater opportunities for low-resource farmers and ranchers.

Colorado

AGRICULTURE VALUE-ADDED DEVELOPMENT FUND PROGRAM

Adopted as State Law (2001) HB 1086

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/lolls/sl2001/sl.191.htm

This legislation created the Agriculture Value-Added Development Board within the state Department of Agriculture to make grants, loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments. The Board also offers tax credits to members of eligible agricultural value-added cooperatives in an amount equal to the lesser of 50 percent of the members' investment or \$15,000, up to a maximum amount per project of \$1.5 million. A total of \$4 million is available annually for tax credits. Ten percent of the tax credits are reserved for projects with capital costs less than or equal to \$1 million, and 10 percent of the funds must be awarded to grant requests of \$50,000 or less. Any remaining funds not used by producers can be utilized by the state for feasibility studies, loans, loan guarantees, grants, and other forms of support for new cooperatives and other types of community-based agricultural value-added businesses.

Maine

REPORT OF THE MAINE FOOD POLICY WORKING GROUP (2006)

www.maine.gov/spo/natural/gov/docs/FoodPolicyReport011106.pdf [download]

In 2005, the Maine legislature passed a law entitled "An Act to Make Revisions to the Laws Governing Agriculture," which asked the state Department of Agriculture to rewrite the 1984 Maine Food Policy. The Department issued a

set of recommendations in January 2006 that outlined a framework for achieving the goal that Maine should produce 80 percent of the calories consumed by its citizens by the year 2020. The recommendations are meant to create marketing opportunities for Maine farm and fishery producers. A Maine Food Policy Council, composed of up to 35 members including state legislators, state agency representatives, and representatives of the public, was recommended to oversee all aspects of the state's food policy.

New Mexico

STATE ASSISTANCE TO A NEW WHEAT GROWING COOPERATIVE (1995)

(see Section 1 above)

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/pub/may05/going.htm>

New York

FARMERS' MARKET GRANT PROGRAM

<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/RFPS.html>

Under the state Agriculture and Markets Law, the Department of Agriculture and Markets offers an annual grant program to assist in the physical construction, reconstruction, improvement, expansion, or rehabilitation of farmers' markets in rural and urban areas of New York State.

Vermont

USE OF VERMONT PRODUCTS AND NUTRITION EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Adopted as State Law H456 (2006)

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/database/status/summary.cfm?Bill=H%2E0456&Session=2006>

<http://www.uvm.edu/~susagctr/CouncilReport06.PDF>

In 2002-2003, less than five percent of the \$13 million spent by Vermont school districts for food went directly to local farmers and producers. This bill creates a mini-grant program (\$15,000 maximum per grant) through which local school districts can increase their purchasing from local producers for reasons of food quality, nutrition education, etc. The bill mandates that the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Markets provide Vermont farmers with educational opportunities to develop their capacities to sell to schools and government agencies. The bill also provides funding to the Vermont Food Venture Center or other food entities that either process local farm products for school and institutional markets or rent equipment to local farmers so that they can do their own processing. On or before January 17, 2007, several state agency heads are to jointly report on strategies to increase the use of local foods in schools, child-care programs, and state agencies.

3) POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO LAND ACCESS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

State and local governments strive to balance government assistance with individual self-reliance. These examples show how government can help producers develop infrastructure or resources or reduce some of the expenses of small farming, and could be adapted to the needs of limited resource farmers and ranchers.

Colorado

SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURAL MARKETING COOPERATIVES

Adopted as State Law 7-56-209

The law states that it is in the public interest to permit "producers of agricultural products to bring to their industry

the high degree of efficiency and merchandising skill evidenced in the manufacturing industries;... that the public interest demands that producers of agricultural products be encouraged to attain a more efficient system of marketing their products and procurement of the necessary equipment and supplies through cooperatives.” Through this legislation, the state Department of Agriculture is to provide assistance to the formation of agricultural cooperatives.

Colorado

AGRICULTURE VALUE-ADDED DEVELOPMENT FUND PROGRAM

(see Section 2 above)

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/olls/sl2001/sl.191.htm

Georgia

FAMILY FARM TAX BREAK

Adopted as State Law (1998) HB 1350

<http://www.newrules.org/agri/gaFarm.html>

Small-scale agriculture in Georgia, specifically qualified family farm producers, benefited from this legislation that reduced ad valorem (in proportion to their value) state taxes on some livestock and crops, fruit or nut-bearing trees and shrubs, and annual and perennial plants.

Iowa (Woodbury County)

ORGANICS CONVERSION POLICY; LOCAL FOOD PURCHASE POLICY

<http://www.woodbury-ia.com/departments/economicdevelopment/press.asp>

To promote rural economic viability and improve farm income, this western Iowa county maintains a policy of granting up to \$5,000 annually in property tax rebates to offset the costs of a three-year conversion to USDA organic production and state certification standards. The county also passed a Local Food Purchase Policy, which requires the county food service to purchase food grown and processed within 100 miles, with a preference for organics.

New York

FINANCING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PROCESSING AND DELIVERING STATE-PROCESSED FOOD

Active legislation in 2005 (Bill# A8000)

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=a.8000>

http://www.hungeractionnys.org/Anti-Hunger_Policy_PlatformSupportingDocuments.pdf [download]

This bill amends the New York state urban development corporation act to assist with financing the development of New York grown foods for delivery to food service markets such as restaurants, schools, universities, and other food service institutions; particularly “in urban and other communities where there has been a lack of availability of such products.” The bill provides for loans, loan guarantees, interest subsidies, and grants, including grants to local or regional organizations that can be used to finance new construction, renovation, or leasehold improvements and the acquisition of land, buildings, machinery, and equipment.

4) POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASING

State and local governments are significant buyers of food for public agencies ranging from prisons to the cafeterias and coffee shops of government buildings. The public process for food producers and suppliers to bid on procurement contracts can be cumbersome and daunting, especially for limited resource farmers. Yet the volume of purchased food can be a significant boost to local agriculture, and government procurement guidelines can sometimes be

designed to allow certain preferences (such as for locally grown products) or to encourage certain participant groups (such as disadvantaged farmers). In some of the following examples, the purchasing of local food products by public institutions is part of a larger effort to support and market the local agriculture industry as a whole.

Colorado

COLORADO AGRICULTURE PROMOTION TASK FORCE

Adopted as State Law: 2004 Colo., Sess. Laws, Chap. #364

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/olls/sl2004a/sl_364.htm

The task force is required to study: 1) the benefits and detriments of requiring governmental entities to give purchasing preferences to Colorado-produced agricultural commodities; 2) methods for improving the state's agricultural industry and encouraging and supporting the economic development of agriculture in rural Colorado; 3) measures to add value to the state agricultural commodities; and 4) better methods for responding to new and changing markets and obtaining competitive advantage for the state's agriculture industry.

Connecticut

PREFERENCE TO STATE PRODUCTS IN GOVERNMENT PURCHASING

Adopted as State Law: 2004 Conn. Acts, P.A. 04-222

<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2004/act/Pa/2004PA-00222-R00SB-00589-PA.htm>

Under this policy, the state Commissioner of Administrative Services, when purchasing dairy products, poultry, eggs, fruits, or vegetables, will give preference to Connecticut products, when comparable in cost to other products that have not been grown or produced in Connecticut. The law also enables the state Commissioner of Agriculture to: 1) establish a program certifying food stores as "Connecticut Farm Fresh Markets" upon proof that they continuously stock 15 percent or more of its shelf space with Connecticut produce and dairy products; 2) develop a program promoting Connecticut restaurants serving state-grown farm products, certifying the restaurant as a "Connecticut Farm Fresh Restaurant;" and 3) develop a program promoting Connecticut schools where at least 20 percent of the food comes from farms in the state, certifying the school as a "Connecticut Farm Fresh School." This legislation sets state procurement in a larger framework that encourages the greater production and consumption of Connecticut foods by all residents.

Kentucky

PREFERENCE TO STATE PRODUCTS IN GOVERNMENT PURCHASING

Adopted as State Law: 2002 Ky. Acts, Chap. #344

<http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/Statrev/ACTS2002/0344.pdf> [download]

This 2002 bill (later amended in 2006) requires the Commissioner of Agriculture to identify opportunities in the state procurement process to use the state's purchasing power to support Kentucky's agricultural economy. Those opportunities shall include the sale of Kentucky-grown agricultural products to any public purchasing unit, including, but not limited to, the Department of Parks, the Department of Corrections, public universities, school districts, and local governments across the Commonwealth. The Commissioner shall report those opportunities to the Governor, the secretary of the Finance and Administration Cabinet, and the Legislative Research Commission, and will also include recommended changes in the procurement system that may accommodate the sale of more Kentucky-grown agricultural products to state agencies. The Parks Department established a pilot project promoting the sale of Kentucky-grown agricultural products in state park restaurants and gift shops.

Maine

SERVING MAINE FOOD PRODUCTS IN STATE FACILITIES

Adopted as State Law: 2005 Me. Laws, Resolve Chapter #64

http://janus.state.me.us/legis/ros/lom/LOM122nd/Res51-100/Res51-100_13.htm

This legislation requires vendors supplying food in the Augusta State House complex and the Cross Cafe to use Maine-grown products whenever possible. The law also requires the state Departments of Administrative and Financial Services, Agriculture, and Food and Rural Resources to assist the vendors and the Cross Cafe in identifying and accessing Maine-grown products.

Michigan

“BUY MICHIGAN FIRST” INITIATIVE

Gubernatorial initiative

<http://www.michigan.gov/buymichiganfirst>

This initiative, sponsored by Governor Jennifer Granholm, directs all state departments to prioritize Michigan-produced food at equal levels with price and service when considering bids. The larger Buy Michigan First effort goes beyond food purchasing to include all purchased products, and there is an emphasis on buying from disadvantaged businesses. The food purchasing effort is being piloted through the Michigan Department of Corrections, with expected expansion to state hospitals, universities, etc. The fine points of the policy are to be worked out in collaboration with the Michigan Food Policy Council.

Minnesota

PURCHASING LOCAL ORGANIC FOOD FOR STATE FOOD SHELF PROGRAMS (2005)

H.F. 1806 Inactive legislation

<http://www3.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/bs/84/HF1806.html>

This bill proposes an increased appropriation for Minnesota’s Food Shelf programs of \$400,000 for 2006 and 2007 from the state general fund. It also requires that a portion of the increase be spent on produce certified as organically grown in Minnesota.

New York

MEMO AUTHORIZING SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR BUYING NY STATE FOOD (2001)

Enabled under State Finance Law S165

The New York State Office of General Services issued a memo to all state departments/agencies easing their discretionary spending (spending without bidding) limits to facilitate local food purchasing. Each unit is authorized to buy up to \$10,000 of locally-grown produce every 15 days outside of the normal bidding process.

Oregon

ESTABLISH STATE AGRICULTURAL POLICY COUNCIL

(2003) HB 3554, Inactive legislation

<http://www.leg.state.or.us/03reg/measures/hb3500.dir/hb3554.intro.html>

Because “Oregon’s food production system is designed to produce a safe, affordable, nutritious and adequate food supply,” and since “Oregon’s food production system must also balance economic, environmental and social considerations that are important to the people of this state,” this bill requires state food purchasing agencies to give preference to food produced in Oregon. It also establishes a 21-member State Agricultural Policy Council to develop guidelines for state food purchasing preferences. This legislation is unusual in that it places the responsibility for procurement policy on a Food Policy Council-like unit, instead of a particular agency. It also directs the Council to publicly promote its actions in support of Oregon agriculture.

5) POLICIES AND PRACTICES RELATED TO FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The national farm-to-school movement has grown rapidly in recent years, fueled by growing recognition of the importance of offering healthy foods in school settings, partly due to the epidemic of childhood obesity. This interest in children's nutrition provides opportunities to incorporate other community food issues, including raising awareness of where food comes from and honoring the food traditions of diverse cultures. Opportunities for cross-cultural education around food and farming are possible in situations in which local farmers can supply nearby school food service and participate in educational programs.

California

CALIFORNIA FRESH START PILOT PROGRAM

Adopted as State Law: 2005 Cal. Statutes, Chap. #236 (SB 281)

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nulsn/cfsp.asp>

This legislation established, within the California Department of Education, the California Fresh Start Pilot Program, allocating a total of \$18.2 million for school breakfast programs. The program is administered in consultation with the Department of Food and Agriculture and the Department of Health Services. The law also states that priority should be given to California farmers when purchasing produce. While most of the state funding is dedicated to food purchasing, the bill also allocates \$400,000 to provide one or more grants to a county office of education or a community college, selected on a competitive basis, to develop an online professional development seminar for school site staff on serving, marketing, and promoting nutritious fruits and vegetables, and to contract with an independent evaluator to conduct a comprehensive on-site evaluation of the Fresh Start program.

California (Berkeley)

BERKELEY SCHOOL FOOD POLICY & SCHOOL LUNCH INITIATIVE

<http://schoollunchinitiative.org>

The Berkeley Unified School District recently passed a policy requiring school cafeterias to serve organic foods to its 9,500 students. The policy explicitly makes a commitment "to increase the amount of products purchased from local farms." To fund the School Lunch Initiative, a partnership was created with the Chez Panisse Foundation and the Center for Ecoliteracy. A portion of the \$650,000 the district currently spends on cafeteria food is allocated for local organic food. Organizers have also sought bulk discounts from growers and manufacturers. In addition, school-sponsored gardens are expected to provide a significant percentage of the necessary food. The school district also will continue to use federal reimbursements from the USDA and sales to students to pay for the program.

Sponsors of the initiative also are working with the USDA to change national policy that requires schools to accept the lowest bids from food processors for school reduced-price meals. Allowing higher bids to be considered would allow the school district to buy from local growers while keeping USDA reimbursements. Due to the higher prices of organics, the district also is developing a business plan and looking for additional funding from state and city sources and school bonds.

Colorado

STATE FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES PILOT PROGRAM

Adopted as State Law: 2006 Colorado Session Laws, Chap. #242

http://www.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/olls/sl2006a/sl_242.htm

This bill, modeled after the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Pilot program, creates a program to distribute free fruits and vegetables throughout the day to students in Colorado public schools. Colorado produce must be used in the pro-

gram to the maximum extent possible. The law also requires that a certain percentage of public schools participating in the program must be eligible for free or reduced lunch under the National School Lunch Act. Under the pilot program, applicant schools are prioritized by several criteria, including program implementation in partnership with local producers.

Connecticut

SCHOOL WELLNESS COMMITTEES

Adopted as State Law: 2005 Conn. Acts, P.A. 05-117; later vetoed by Governor

<http://www.cga.ct.gov/2005/ACT/PA/2005PA-00117-R00SB-01309-PA.htm>

Under this legislation, each local and regional board of education in Connecticut would establish a School Wellness Committee to monitor and implement nutrition and physical activity policies. Each such committee shall make recommendations to its board of education regarding the purchase of Connecticut-grown foods for school meals, conducting school fundraisers with healthy food items, establishing a nutrition education curriculum, and promoting physical education and exercise.

This is one example of a policy now required of every school district that participates in the federal school meals program, under the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. For examples of policies enacted in other areas and related information, go to http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/programs/school_wellness.html

New Mexico

STATE FARM-TO-SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Adopted as State Law: (2001) House Joint Memorial 34

<http://legis.state.nm.us/Sessions/01%20Regular/memorials/house/HJM034.html>

This legislation asks the New Mexico Department of Agriculture and the State Department of Education to collaborate on increasing the use of New Mexico agricultural products in preparation of meals in the public schools. The language notes increasing the use of New Mexico agricultural products in public school meals would expand marketing opportunities for New Mexico farmers and ranchers.

New York

STATE FARM-TO-SCHOOL ENHANCEMENT FUND

Legislation introduced in 2006

<http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=A02921>

This bill seeks to expand the state's 2001 bill creating farm-to-school programs by establishing an enhancement fund to further encourage educational institutions to purchase local farm products. "Although the [2001] program has been embraced by school districts, the budgets of school breakfast and lunch programs do not necessarily have sufficient resources to contract and purchase products from small and medium size local farms." This bill will create a special revenue fund used specifically to aid in direct purchases of New York agricultural goods.

6) GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

As described in Part One, local, state, and regional Food Policy Councils (FPCs) generally strive to take a comprehensive and integrated view of the food system in their areas and to use this perspective to propose or implement positive interventions. Yet the amount of government policy and funding support they receive is typically low, as is the level of public recognition. Whether officially sanctioned by government or not, FPCs are worthy of greater public support and funding, based on their potential for promoting broader collaboration between diverse organizations and creating innovative food system strategies.

Food Policy Councils in the US are growing in numbers and have started networking and sharing best practices, supported by CFSC's Food Policy Council Program. If more councils begin to work to improve opportunities for limited resource producers, they can share these examples with other FPCs, and encourage others to focus on this issue.

California (San Francisco)

SAN FRANCISCO FOOD ALLIANCE

<http://www.sffoodsystems.org>

The San Francisco Food Alliance is a citizens group focused on building an integrated local food system through education, advocacy, and community representation. The Alliance is coordinated by a public/private partnership called San Francisco Food Systems. Housed and staffed within the San Francisco Department of Public Health, San Francisco Food Systems began as an action research partnership around food security between the Department's Environmental Health Section and community organizations in the Bayview and Hunter's Point neighborhoods. San Francisco Food Systems has gone on to initiate a number of collaborative projects focused on community food assessments, farm-to-school resources, and increasing the utilization of farmers' markets.

Maine

REPORT OF THE MAINE FOOD POLICY WORKING GROUP (2006)

(see Section 2 above)

Michigan

MICHIGAN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

<http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc>

The Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC) was created within the state Agriculture Department in June 2005 by Gov. Jennifer Granholm (under Executive Order 2005-13; <http://www.michigan.gov/gov/0,1607,7-168-21975-119526--,00.html>) with funding from the Kellogg Foundation, to recommend food system policies to the Governor by October 2006. The recommendations were issued on schedule (<http://www.michigan.gov/mfpc/0,1607,7-228--151980--,00.html>). Promoting the purchase of Michigan foods was one of its "broad issue areas for investigation and recommendation" and is the focus of one of the four MFPC task forces. The MFPC may assist in refining the food purchasing dimension of the Governor's "Buy Michigan First" initiative (see Section 4 above).

Montana (Missoula)

MISSOULA COUNTY FOOD AND AGRICULTURE COALITION

<http://www.umt.edu/cfa>

This Food Policy Council was created by a joint city/county resolution in 2005, and received initial financial support from the USDA Community Food Projects grant program. Achieving local food security has become a major goal of the FPC. A community food assessment identified the low economic viability of farming in Missoula County as a primary threat to this goal.

Oregon (Portland)

PORTLAND/MULTNOMAH COUNTY FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

<http://www.portlandonline.com/OSD/index.cfm?c=ecjja>

The City of Portland's Office of Sustainable Development provides staff coordination for this citizen advisory group. This is part of a multi-dimensional municipal strategy to achieve Portland's sustainability goals by considering food policy along with green building promotion, energy conservation, and solid waste and recycling practices. The FPC organized one-day Farm Direct Marketing Workshops (funded by USDA Risk Management Agency) for immigrant farmers in both 2004 and 2005 attended by almost 80 Asian and Hispanic farmers. The reports from each workshop are available through the FPC's website.

Part Three:

An Overview of Effective Non-governmental Approaches

A variety of non-governmental organizations are doing effective on-the-ground work in support of limited resource producers at the local, regional, and national levels. Understandably, some of the most successful work is being done by organizations that have strong roots in the communities they work with and direct knowledge of their capabilities and challenges. The results of this work and the lessons learned can provide a foundation for the creation of public policies to facilitate similar activities in the future.

This part of the report provides an overview of the types of efforts being led by US non-governmental organizations to support limited resource producers. It is organized into five sections based on themes that are not mutually exclusive:

1. Facilitating access to land and capital, and land retention;
2. Teaching sustainable agriculture practices;
3. Managing risks and building the capacity of limited resource producers to successfully compete in the market;
4. Forming cooperative arrangements to collect and share resources;
5. Aiding immigrant and refugee producers in becoming farmers in the US.

Note that most of the research for this section was conducted between July and November of 2006. In addition, note that non-governmental projects benefiting disadvantaged farmers are not exclusive to the non-profit sector. In the summer of 2006, Kaiser Permanente began a pilot project to source produce for 19 Northern California hospitals from ten California farmers, primarily people of color.¹

ACCESS TO RESOURCES: CAPITAL, LAND, AND LAND RETENTION

The structure of the US economy makes it very difficult to make a living by farming, and most US farmers rely on loans and credit to help cover their operating costs. Yet limited resource producers, especially people of color, often have less access to crop insurance, credit, and operating loans needed to farm successfully. For example, a USDA study in the mid-1990s revealed that “minorities” participated in Farm Service Agency programs at a much lower rate than other farmers, and received less than their share of USDA support in the form of loans, crop payments, and disaster payments. A variety of factors contribute to this uneven distribution of resources, including lack of awareness of the programs, a perceived lack of eligibility, and difficulty meeting program qualifications among some farmers, along with both intentional and unintentional discrimination against particular groups of producers.

Due to litigation against USDA by farmer advocacy groups seeking to make its programs more accessible and equitable, more federal government programs are now in place to assist “minority” farmers in acquiring capital. However, the process for applying for loans and grants is still difficult, and limited resource producers are still underserved by USDA and many other agencies. So assisting such farmers in learning about and applying for USDA programs and other resources is a key role of non-governmental organizations.

Even more than capital, land is the most important resource for agricultural production, and lack of access to land can be a primary obstacle to the entry of new and

¹ “Chez Kaiser’s food revolution: Hospital experiment putting locally grown produce on patients’ plates.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 6, 2006.

immigrant farmers. The retention of land also can be a major challenge, especially for African-American farmers in the South. Rural land ownership by African-Americans has been in steady decline in the US. As many as 19 million acres were under African-American ownership in 1910, but this declined to 7.7 million acres by 1999, with only 2.5 million acres owned by African-American farmers.²

A lack of estate planning, lack of access to legal counsel, and a high rate of foreclosure all contributed to this land loss.³ Yet institutional discrimination also played a significant role. African-American farmers were more likely to be denied USDA farm loans or to wait longer for loan approval, which held up operations and prevented them from planting on a timely schedule. For some farmers, unfair treatment was a key factor in contributing to financial losses and foreclosure. These patterns of discrimination were documented in several landmark class action suits filed against the USDA by groups of African-American farmers, which were settled in 1999 via The Pigford Consent Decree.⁴

The issue of African-American farmland retention is thus characterized by a complex set of cultural, historical, and political dimensions, which must be addressed at multiple levels. One approach taken by some non-governmental organizations is educating farmers on the legal issues involved and the land protection tools available. The **Federation of Southern Cooperatives** is one of the most established and respected organizations working on this issue. Through their Land Retention Project, they conduct a variety of outreach actions to farmers and other African-American landowners. These include workshops, educational materials, one-on-one consultation on individual cases, an attorney referral network, and a summer “externship” program for law students. Since its inception, the Land Retention Project has developed a strong collaborative network with state and federal government agencies, Southern land-grant universities, and community-based organizations.

The **Land Loss Prevention Project**, a non-profit law firm, focuses more specifically on lawsuits. It has successfully litigated on behalf of many African-American

farmers denied benefits under the Pigford decision and, in other cases, in response to wrongful actions in both the public and private sectors. In addition, a new organizational model is being created by the **Black Family Land Trust**, formed in 2004 to combine proven methods of conservation land trusts and community development organizations and to apply them specifically to preventing African-American land loss. They are partnering with the Land Retention Project, American Farmland Trust, and other organizations.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE TRAINING

In some ways, these are promising times for small farmers in the US. Consumer interest in supporting local and family-scale farms is expanding rapidly (the “putting a face on food” concept behind Community Supported Agriculture is a good example). Demand for organic foods has grown rapidly for 10 years, and interest in green and sustainable products in general is increasing.

Sustainable farming and ranching practices, which tend to be more labor-intensive and less mechanized than ‘conventional’ agriculture, often lend themselves well to small-scale farming. They draw on traditional methods, such as crop rotation and pasture feeding, known to generations of farmers, as well as modern scientific discoveries and technical innovations. Sustainable agriculture enterprises are well poised to respond to consumer demands for cleaner, greener, and locally grown food produced by independent farmers. Recognizing these opportunities, organizations working with limited resource producers are increasingly active in promoting sustainable farming practices, helping farmers understand and obtain organic certification, and helping them compete in the expanding market for sustainably produced food.

² Cited in the 1999 USDA Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (<http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census97/aelos/aelos.htm>)

³ Cited in Miessha Thomas, Jerry Pennick, and Heather Gray, “What is African-American Land Ownership?” a 2004 report by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund.

⁴ See <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/RS20430.pdf> for the background behind the Pigford Consent Decree.

The regional **Sustainable Agriculture Working Groups** are a notable model for promoting and supporting family-scale, sustainable farming in the US. There are presently six working groups across the nation - Northeast, South, Midwest, West, New York State, and California - encompassing the 48 contiguous states and three Canadian provinces. Formed between 1988 and 1994, each operates independently and establishes its own structure and priorities. Still, they share common objectives to foster ecologically sustainable farming practices, promote the economic viability of sustainable and family-scale farming, and establish sustainable agriculture as a component of regional and local food systems.

These regional working groups can provide significant benefits to limited resource producers. The **Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group** (SSAWG) serves as an example. Based in a region with a significant number of limited resource farmers, SSAWG has from its beginning included organizations dedicated to assisting disadvantaged farmers, to halting the loss of African-American-owned farmland, and to revitalizing Southern rural communities. Its annual conference is a major event drawing hundreds of people and an important vehicle for limited resource farmers (some attending through scholarships) and others to network with each other and to experience a range of workshops, field trips, and short courses on topics like organic farming methods, better business practices, project planning, and community food systems. SSAWG, along with member organizations such as Appalachian Sustainable Development and the Community Farm Alliance in Kentucky, also has assisted Southern farmers with transitioning from growing tobacco to farming organic food crops in those states that have channeled their money from tobacco lawsuit settlements into farm programs.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Farming and ranching come with many built-in financial and operational risks, and limited resource farmers and ranchers are more likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of drought, crop disease and failure, debt burdens, falling

commodity prices, etc. Thus, assisting them with risk management training and helping them build individual capacity to succeed as producers is of vital importance.

In California's Monterey County, the **Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association** – better known as **ALBA** – gives Salinas Valley farmworkers the opportunity to learn the production methods and business of organic farming. Since 2001, they have sponsored a Small Farmer Education program (or PEPA, Programa Educativo para Pequeños Agricultores). In this six-month, Spanish-language program, 20-30 participants receive instruction in soil fertility, equipment maintenance, irrigation management, integrated pest management, marketing, bookkeeping, small business management, and organic certification procedures, along with English language instruction. ALBA (which means day-break in Spanish) conducts the farm training on a 200-acre site south of Salinas and provides reduced-rate half-acre parcels for PEPA graduate/apprentices to begin market farming. The new farmers can then sell their produce to ALBA's distribution arm, ALBA Organics, with outlets as far north as San Francisco, and through ALBA's local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation.

An important dimension to building the capacity of limited resource farmers is developing their ability to conceive of a solid project plan and successfully apply for grants. **Growing Power, Inc.**, based in Milwaukee and Chicago but having a national reach, has helped many limited resource rural and urban producers develop the skills to conceive a project idea, strategically develop the idea, and identify the steps necessary to make it a reality. The two-day workshops held at Growing Power's Milwaukee campus include many in the practical skill areas of vermiculture and aquaculture. But participants, many of whom receive a scholarship from Growing Power, also can attend workshops on product marketing and project planning, in which they are asked to envision their goals and present these to the other participants.

In 2006, Growing Power, an organization led by people of color with a long history of successful grant awards, initiated an effort to provide training in grant writing to

organizations serving people of color interested in applying for awards from the USDA and other sources. With funding from the USDA Community Food Projects (CFP) grant program, they organized conference calls to bring together representatives of organizations interested in applying for grants, and provided one-on-one consultation to interested applicants. In the 2006 CFP grant cycle, five proposals were submitted from organizations with which Growing Power had worked, with one being funded. Growing Power also received an additional two years of CFP funding to continue this capacity-building work.

Finally, on the national level, the **Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural**, based in Washington, DC, is a significant player in building the economic sustainability of low-resource farmers and farmworkers and in promoting a socially just food system. An alliance of over 70 organizations, the Rural Coalition has worked to address many governmental and non-governmental barriers limiting the economic opportunities of disadvantaged producers. It has been particularly effective in developing training methods for keeping accurate business records, which helps farmers improve their economic viability and qualify for various support programs. Over 1,500 farmers have participated in these efforts. Through its collaboration with the USDA Risk Management Agency, the Rural Coalition produced *A Guide to Financial Record Keeping for Farmers and Ranchers* as a basic introduction to the types of records needed for tax returns and other accounting purposes. The document combined the training curricula of almost 20 organizations and is used as a guide to help trainers customize their teaching to specific clients.

AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

The risks and benefits of farming or ranching sometimes can be effectively shared under a cooperative operating model. While convincing independent-minded farmers to join a cooperative can be challenging, this approach can facilitate both individual and group financial success. Outreach efforts can identify market opportunities that may be effectively addressed by a business cooperative.

Successful outreach also can assist limited resource producers with understanding all aspects of cooperative business principles, including structure, financing, and leadership and governance.

Agricultural cooperatives are non-governmental entities and eligible for some forms of government assistance. Part Two of this report gives brief descriptions of two cooperatives of limited resource farmers and ranchers in New Mexico and Montana: the Sangre de Cristo Agricultural Producers Cooperative and the Flathead Native Agricultural Cooperative. Both coops were successfully established with the assistance of USDA and extension.

In Kankakee County, Illinois, 60 miles south of Chicago, the **Pembroke Farmers Cooperative** was begun in 1999 to pool the efforts of a small (now numbering around 30) group of African-American farmers struggling to earn livelihoods on land too sandy to successfully grow corn and soybeans. With funding from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and a USDA rural development grant, and with staff assistance from the Kankakee County Farm Service Agency, the Pembroke farmers created a small marketing and distribution business. They supply processed, prairie-fed chicken to Chicago restaurants and health food stores and ethnic vegetables such as okra, collard greens, and purple-hulled peas to Chicago farmers' markets.

Farm cooperatives also can benefit each other in times of need and can be especially important to low-resource producers. In Mississippi, Hurricane Katrina heavily affected the **Indian Springs Farmers Association**, a cooperative of African-American fruit and vegetable farmers located 70 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. Half of the cooperative's 38 farmers were "completely wiped out;" its nine-year-old grading/packing and office facility was damaged; and many of the cooperative's market outlets in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast were out of business. While the markets did not re-open quickly, more immediate help arrived from other cooperatives in the form of soy biodiesel fuel to help plant fall crops, and space in a Memphis farmers' market for their harvested crops.

The formation and support of agricultural cooperatives is an appropriate project direction for non-governmental organizations that can guide participant farmers through the business and financial issues involved in collective self-management. Perhaps the best known of such organizations is the **Federation of Southern Cooperatives**, which serves individual farm cooperatives in 12 states with assistance and information on land retention, sustainable agriculture techniques, and cooperative marketing. The Federation works with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop conservation demonstration projects through the Small Farm Initiative Program. The Federation also has 14 member community-controlled credit unions, with \$94 million in assets.

NEW IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE FARMING

The future of small-scale farming in the US lies in large part with the increasing number of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers with farming backgrounds who are farming or wish to farm in their new home country. This trend has implications for addressing multiple issues, including increasing access to locally grown fresh foods, improving public nutrition, and integrating diverse cultures. Non-governmental organizations are using various approaches, including assisting immigrants in developing business plans to supply culturally appropriate foods to their own and other cultural communities and helping agricultural workers transition from migrant employment to owning and operating their own farms. Yet the obstacles to immigrant/refugee farming are many. Some are common to most immigrants and refugees (language barriers, cultural differences, bureaucracy, discrimination); while others (land acquisition, business planning) are more specific to new farmers. Assistance to new immigrant and refugee farmers by non-governmental organizations is perhaps one of the most active areas of assistance to limited resource producers in the US.

In Maine, which has received numerous refugees from Sudan, Somalia, and elsewhere, the **New American**

Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP), a program of the Maine Farms Project of Coastal Enterprises, Inc., offers

information, training, tools, and resources to recently resettled refugee farmers and immigrant farmworkers from the world over now living in Maine. NASAP's primary goal is to deliver focused outreach and technical assistance, including educational programs, to limited-resources immigrant farmers, helping them to build successful Maine farms that are consistent with their cultural and lifestyle aspirations.⁵

NASAP has established "training gardens" for immigrant families and the Lewiston Farmers' Market as an outlet for low-income consumers to purchase food from the training gardens. It also has begun building marketing relationships between immigrant farmers and institutional and restaurant food service professionals in Maine.

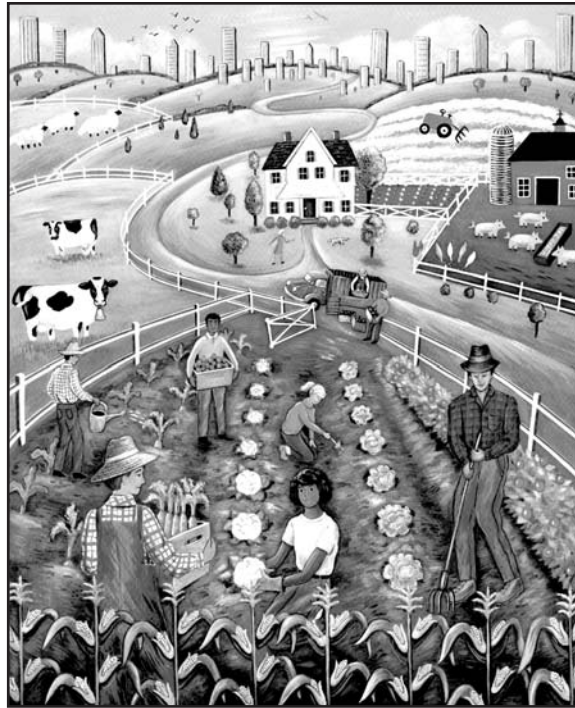
In Massachusetts, the **New Entry Sustainable Farming Project** (NESFP) operates out of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Boston and Community Teamwork, Inc. in Lowell. Its academic base allows the program to create educational research and internship opportunities for students in the Friedman School's Agriculture, Food and Environment program.⁶ The NESFP farmers are primarily Khmer and Hmong, and also include many from Latin America and Africa. The goals of the program are similar to those of NASAP, and NESFP also concentrates on a specific geographic area by utilizing farm sites in Lancaster and Dracut, Massachusetts that produce food for local farmers' markets, and for Asian groceries and restaurants across Massachusetts.

The **National Immigrant Farming Initiative** (NIFI) was begun in 2003 to build support and advocacy networks among immigrant farming activities across the US. NIFI focuses on four key areas: training and capacity building; advocacy activities directed toward a reauthorized Farm Bill; networking and information sharing; and providing direct financial support to individual proj-

⁵ see <http://www.ceimaine.org/content/view/115/164/>

⁶ see <http://www.nesfp.org>

ects. Funded by the USDA Risk Management Agency, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Heifer International, NIFI serves as an effective model for horizontally connecting a number of immigrant farming projects through networking and information sharing, while also establishing a vertical conduit for funding and advocacy in which NIFI works on behalf of the projects. In establishing these horizontal and vertical connections, NIFI is fortunate to utilize the staff expertise of Heifer International and its skills at organizing and uniting participants around farming and immigrant communities.



The **Community Food Security Coalition** (CFSC) is North American organization dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for all people at all times. We seek to develop self-reliance among all communities in obtaining their food and to create a system of growing, manufacturing, processing, making available, and selling food that is regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability.

CFSC's national **Food Policy Council Program** provides resources, training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to current and emerging Food Policy Councils at no cost. This program also facilitates linkages between Food Policy Councils and local farmers and ranchers, especially those who are women, people of color, limited resource, and from other traditionally underserved groups.

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