



MISSISSIPPI

Managing Marketing and Legal Risks Associated With Direct-to-Intermediaries Sales Strategies for Locally Grown Food and Food Products: Mississippi Market Ready™ Training

Kenneth Hood, Mississippi State University, hood@agecon.msstate.edu

Project Introduction

Expended Amount: \$24,258

This project was a direct result of interest expressed by participants in a previous SRMEC project conducted in Mississippi and Arkansas in 2012. In the previous project, producers were educated on how to sell fresh produce to retail establishments with a focus on restaurants as alternative markets for fresh fruit and vegetable producers. A recurring question kept coming up during follow-up sessions – “how do I sell to school districts?” The focus of this project was to bring together school procurement agents and producers with the purpose of educating both parties about regulations and requirements involved in selling fresh fruits and vegetables to school districts in Mississippi. The expected outcome was to increase the sale of locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables to school districts in Mississippi.

Project Participants

Participants in this project were local Mississippi fresh fruit and vegetable producers and Mississippi school district food procurement agents. Most of the producers were small-scale fresh produce producers across the State of Mississippi. Most of the producers

struggle to find consistent markets for their produce due to the size of their operations. Many of the producers have limited access to markets and are engaged mainly in direct sales such as on-farm sales or farmers’ markets. Most of the participants were interested in selling to local school districts but did not understand how to engage the school system. Many producers did not attempt to sell to schools because of misunderstanding the regulations involved in school procurement. The other set of participants was the school district procurement agents. Many of the school district agents wanted to purchase local produce but were unaware of local producers or did not have the time to find local producers.

Project Area

The project area is the State of Mississippi. Four training sessions were scheduled to reach producers and school employees in all 82 counties in Mississippi. The four sessions were scheduled in four different sectors of the state with a meeting in the northeast (Verona), northwest (Cleveland), southeast (Hattiesburg) and southwest (Jackson) sectors of the state. The four different session locations were selected to allow anyone in the state to have access to a training site within an hour or less drive time one way.

Project Outcomes

Due to the success of the four originally scheduled trainings, two additional training sessions were requested and delivered in the state. One extra session was requested at a Small Farms Conference at Alcorn State University, an 1890 land-grant institution, for predominantly minority producers. The event was held in Jackson, Mississippi, and was attended by 82 participants. The Mississippi Department of Education requested a second event, also held in Jackson, which was attended by 67 school district procurement agents.

The four originally scheduled events were held two weeks apart in January and February with a total of 144 participants consisting of 92 producers and 52 school procurement agents. At the end of the project, 6 school districts were listed on the Mississippi MarketMaker website as buyers of local produce. Prior to the trainings, none were listed as buyers of local produce.

The Mississippi Department of Education released the following data for school food purchases for local fresh fruits and vegetables:

Year	Cases	Dollars Spent
SY 2013-14	8,159	\$265,280.40
SY 2014-15	32,859	\$1,034,869.77

These figures represent a significant increase over the previous year and a positive influence in the State of Mississippi for local fresh produce sales utilized by the Mississippi school districts.

– Priscilla Ammerman
Mississippi State Department of Education

***Sandra Martini, H. L. Goodwin** and **Ronald L. Rainey**, Grant Coordinator and Co-Directors, respectively, of the Southern Risk Management Education Center, serve as editors of this report series. To learn more about risk management education programs and resources, visit the Southern Center website (<http://srmec.uark.edu>) or the Extension Risk Management Education Program link (www.extensionrme.org).

Printed by University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Printing Services.