

## Task Force Sprouts Rural Roots Association

### *The Situation*

Agriculture in the Inland Northwest is a combination of large and small farms growing a variety of food and fiber crops. The population of the region is becoming more urbanized, and it is losing its connection with the farm. Urban and suburban dwellers may seek wholesome food, but they do not necessarily identify the purchase of that food with the local agricultural economy.

Through value-added enterprises, existing and future small farms, niche farms, and market gardeners can add to the local economy, and preserve the quality of life in the region. Local farmers' market associations wish to attract more customers. To do this, they need to also attract more producers. They need to increase their marketing skills, and provide production information to potential and new members. Local communities are starting to recognize farmers' markets as a potential "draw" to their downtown areas.

### *Our Response*

An Inland Northwest Community Food Systems Task Force was formed in the fall of 1997 (see Impact Statement CE97KOVjpc01.doc, 8 October 1997, available through Univ. of Idaho Extension, Kootenai County office). Members of the task force include small acreage farmers in the Inland Northwest, representatives of Washington Tilth and area Farmers' Market Associations, WSU and Univ. of Idaho faculty, agency reps., policy makers, consumers, and writers.

### *Achievements*

Task force members developed a list of priorities for educational programming and networking during meetings in the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1998. Task force goals were developed. A number of activities were conducted to meet these goals (see Impact Statement "Small Acreage Farmers Build Momentum"). Achievements in the 1998/99 year included:

- ? ? The development of the "**Kootenai Kitchen Directory**" - a listing of businesses in Kootenai County who are willing to rent their kitchens to specialty foods producers.
- ? ? A quarterly **newsletter** "Bringing Home the Harvest," an Inland Northwest Community Food System **list-serve** (inwfs-list@uidaho.edu), and a **web site** were developed to share information and provide a networking option. Small acreage farmers contribute to both the newsletter and the list-serve.
- ? ? An **Inland Northwest Small Acreage Farming Conference** was held in Moscow ID which drew 170 people from throughout the northwest. Many of the speakers were small acreage farmers from northern Idaho and eastern Washington. Evaluations indicated this was an outstanding conference.
- ? ? A **Small Acreage Farming/Market Gardening Course** in the fall, 1998 attracted 42 participants. Evaluations indicated that 94% of those taking the 11 week class could take the next step in their small farm planning.

- ? ? Extension faculty and a small-acreage herb producer wrote an extension **publication on herb production**. Copies of the publication have been used in herb classes in the region, and have been sent upon request to faculty and farmers nationwide.
- ? ? **Organic weed control methods** used in basil production were evaluated using on-farm research methods. This research will be continued in 2000.
- ? ? The task force membership voted to become a membership organization "**Rural Roots**" and a leadership team was selected. University faculty remain active as advisers.

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## ***The Future***

- ? ? Rural Roots, University of Idaho and Washington State University faculty will partner on a number of projects:
  - ? ? Evaluate the feasibility of a regional (the Idaho Panhandle and eastern Washington) distribution center for local produce;
  - ? ? Develop regional buyers guides;
  - ? ? Continue to evaluate sustainable production practices through on-farm research;
  - ? ? Develop educational materials for consumers about local and regional food systems.
- ? ? Rural Roots members will re-evaluate their goals in the fall, 1999, and move forward on priority projects.

## ***For More Information***

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