

## **CASE STUDY**

### **Florida**

#### **Movers and Shakers**

In 1995, a group of farmers formed the New North Florida Marketing Cooperative. The goal of the cooperative was to provide marketing services to the participating farmers, and provide training and education in marketing options such as farmers' markets, roadside stands, and selling to local school districts. The goal is to increase the amount of product being sold, thereby increasing the farmers' incomes.

#### **Description**

The New North Florida Cooperative began by selling farm fresh produce to 13 schools in Gadsden County, Florida. In six years, the marketing efforts have increased so that the Cooperative now sells to 15 school districts in Florida, Georgia and Alabama. Through these districts, they are serving 300,000 students!

The farmers focus on producing three to four main items, on a seasonal basis, and sell to schools year-round. The items are incorporated into menu planning, generally as a side dish or as a fresh fruit dessert. The Cooperative has developed a good reputation by providing high-quality produce, prompt deliveries, fair prices and for their courteous professionalism. They refer to this as "relationship marketing". The positive word-of-mouth has been very effective in opening the door to the program in other school districts.

#### **Other Project Components**

As part of its marketing and promotion, the Cooperative has developed posters showing the life cycle of a crop – from planting to harvesting. These posters are displayed in school cafeterias.

#### **Funding**

Approximately 90% of the funding for the Cooperative's marketing efforts come from the sales of their members and participants. These sales come from a variety of direct marketing alternatives, including farmers' markets, roadside stands, and through their sales to schools. When the initial farm to school program was ready to launch, the Cooperative did receive a \$4,000 grant from the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service. They also received a \$3,000 loan from the West Florida Resource Conservation and Development Council (WFR CDC). Most of the grant money received by the Cooperative has been used for infrastructure and equipment purchase, such as refrigerated trucks and cool and cold storage facilities.

#### **Labor**

Most of the labor for preparing the products, as well as growing, them comes from the Cooperative members and participants. During particularly busy times, day labor is also utilized. Since the farmers have the ability to wash, chop and bag the produce, there is no additional labor on the part of the school food service.

### **Farmers and Crops**

The Cooperative provides marketing services and opportunities for over 100 members and participants in Florida, Georgia and Alabama. Their primary crops are collards, field peas, muscadine grapes and a few turnip greens.

### **Product Delivery**

Deliveries are made 2 ½ to 3 days per week depending on school menus. While much of the produce is delivered by the Cooperative, they do work with other produce vendors as well. The produce that is delivered is packaged and has a label with a logo and a nutritional analysis. The Florida A & M University provided some technical assistance to develop the label.

A delivery trailer was purchased by the Cooperative, and a cooling system from a recreational camper was installed to keep the produce at a relatively low temperature while in transit. Styrofoam insulation was also installed to protect the produce from the outside heat. The logo is printed on the side of the trailer along with the name of the Cooperative and the phrase, “The Pinnacle of Quality”.

### **Price**

The Cooperative has developed a niche market as there is little competition in providing fresh, washed, chopped, bagged, and delivered greens. Consequently, the Cooperative is able to negotiate a price that is both fair to the school district and profitable for the growers.

### **School Food Service**

The Cooperative members gained the respect of the school food purchasers by initially *donating a sample of their product – 3,000 pounds of greens*. The greens and fruits have been met with an enthusiastic reaction from children, which has been a big factor in administrative acceptance of the product. All members of the Cooperative go out of their way to be helpful and courteous when delivering the product, and they unload the boxes and stack them neatly in cold storage facilities. After each delivery, the cafeteria manager is notified that the order was delivered. The Cooperative demonstrates courtesy, provides convenience, and protects the high quality of its products by taking this extra step.

### **Kitchen Facilities**

Since schools are not processing the product, facilities become more of an issue for the Cooperative members, who must have storage, refrigeration, and a covered area for washing, cutting, and bagging equipment. Originally, all of the washing was done in large steel tubs, and chopping was done by hand. There was no refrigeration system and therefore no storage capacity. As a result, harvesting and processing had to be done in one day – one very long day. To continue in business, the Cooperative purchased a packing/processing shed, a cutting/chopping machine, wash sinks, and a refrigeration and storage system. Funds for purchasing equipment came from grant funding and bank loans.

**Sustainability**

The New North Florida Cooperative has been sustainable since it began, as 90% of its funding comes from direct marketing sales. The few loans and grants they have received have helped it to build infrastructure with equipment purchases.

**Contacts:**

Glyen Holmes or Vonda Richardson  
215 Perry Paite Bldg. South  
FAMU  
Tallahassee, FL 32307  
Phone: 850-352-2400 or 850-599-3546  
Fax: 850-352-9986  
Email: [nnfc@digitalexp.com](mailto:nnfc@digitalexp.com)