

Place-Based Labels and Branding

Discussion Leader: Scott Oneto, Tuolumne County

Wed, Dec 2, 2008

11am-12pm

12 participants

After everyone introduced themselves, Scott asked the group about challenges they'd like to discuss right off the bat.

- Funding for marketing approaches to help local growers
- Success stories (implemented projects that worked—steps, process, timeline, benefits, buy in)
- Funding is a good starting point for place-based labels and organizations, but it can be a limitation.

Erin Derden-Little, formally of UC-SAREP and now with Humboldt Buy Fresh, Buy Local: UC-SAREP Website has documents to download that summarize challenges, successes, patterns, much of it authored by Erin. Capay Valley Grown, Placer Grown, Calaveras Grown, and Select Sonoma were very young organizations at the time of research and it takes at least 5 years to see any concrete evidence about your impact. Most brands are trying to increase incomes of farmers (hard to quantify, much of the data is anecdotal). Results showed increased awareness of brands. These projects were funded by grants and partners. Membership-based as well (fees)—but they didn't cover all costs. There is the issue of nesting the brands—County, regional, region within a county, and CA Grown. So Buy Fresh, Buy Local is an overarching brand and how do you incorporate others? In Capay Valley, farmers already had brand names which added to the power of Capay Valley Grown brand versus the other way around.

Scott Oneto: A lot of place based brands have no governing outside the actual organization itself. They're self policing. In the European Union (EU) there is much more regulation and government involvement.

Janet Momsen, UCD Dept of Human and Community Development: In the EU, the system is product-based “Onions from X” or Champagne—whereas in the US, local food is more an overarching theme with many products in it.

Jenny Huston, Director of Culinary Social Enterprise from Bay Area Community Services: Here it started in Napa/Sonoma with place-based branding. We’re the only farm-to-table Meals on Wheels program in the country. Each vendor defines what local means to them (western, state level, etc.). It is very hard to get some products “really” local. We should be setting parameters and defining what local is NOW. We’re early in the process, but we need it.

The group then launched into a discussion of issues of sustainability and local branding. Main points were:

- Vendors should require sustainability parameters when sourcing local brands
- Standardizing the term “local” is not very meaningful—different for every region. But then again, organic is standardized; local and sustainable are not yet standardized. We really need international standards, but EU is not pretty either. A strictly defined governed/regulation to define local is not the best approach. In food systems discussion, we should be as inclusive as possible. Build diverse as constituency as possible. Raleys, large growers, etc...could be involved too.
- Local and organic can be unbundled in order to include more farmers in the local brand (don’t exclude based on organic, but they can still be sustainable, so if someone doesn’t have certification, they can still participate)
- What is the real purpose of the label? To market the product or to promote a certain message/vision/message? Define mission/message first, which then defines partners, label approach.
- Worse case scenario is competing labels for what is certified sustainable wood (international standards, and forest industry and consumers are confused). This can happen with food too. We need to think thoughtfully about the messages and where we can be collaborative instead of competing for our niche in the market.
- The local programs need ground up pressure from consumers and producers. Consumers are getting a lot of power! Big stores can participate too, beyond greenwashing marketing campaigns.

Success stories (implemented projects that worked—steps, process, timeline, benefits, buy in)

What local foods are regulated and what about issues with meat? USDA has restrictions on meat labeled “local.” No label restrictions on fresh fruit/veg/dairy. Wine is very regulated by Alcohol and Firearms/Tobacco. What about direct marketing meat product from state-level in North Carolina—using small processors that are not USDA, but rather state inspected. There are some retail restrictions on whether or not they are state or USDA inspected.

Scott: It took 5 years to see results for the Farms of Tuolumne County organization. Started as UC Cooperative Extension program, but then they formed own board of directors and are considered a 501c5. No paid staff, all volunteer. Still rely heavily on board for day to day functioning. Potential includes building community food system, but it takes time and money. They are not tied closely to big urban centers so products go to mom and pop stores, smaller food markets, and farmers markets.

Erin: Capay Valley Grown group had a shop in the NutTree (closed now). Small farmers market is in place. All members have label in digital form so they can include it too in their packaging, but much of the products are direct sales through farmers market and CSA. Members to go Bay area farmers markets.

Erin: Actual creation of a label can be a challenging process—artistic opinions, etc...She recommends using an outside consultant and save group energy to work on other issues. Humboldt Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign is part of Food Roots, and they help other groups design labels. Designer has a menu of graphics you choose from and then you custom design your label. Other groups have their own labels—can be expensive, look for in-kind donations.

Kim Rodrigues, UCCE North Coast: Jenny had question about social enterprise branding—programs that fund themselves, have a business component to fund their programs to support their mission. We need to have products we sell to help fund our programs. We need to brand our stuff—similar process as local.