

## **Organizational Overview**

Since 1976, the American Friends Service Committee has focused its work on facilitating agricultural development among communities connected to the *acequia* systems within New Mexico. By helping traditional and land-based communities in the state to assert their water and land rights, we have established long-standing relationships with community farms and created inroads with the largely underserved, limited resourced, socially disadvantaged populations in New Mexico. Our project partner, the New Mexico Acequia Association, aims to protect water as a community resource and strengthen the farming and ranching traditions of native families and communities.

By jointly serving as a Regional Lead Team in New Mexico, AFSC and the New Mexico Acequia Association can connect diverse communities of farmers, ranchers and stakeholders in a “value chain” food system, share information in areas of marketing, training and technical assistance, and bring innovative models to a forum of regional participants.

## **Regional Priorities**

**Networking** – Ideally, we would start in the regions of New Mexico where we already have long-standing relationships with local growers who express the desire and show the potential to “scale up” and connect them with service providers, institutions and organizations throughout the state, which could provide the market and/or technical skills to help them meet their potential business and communal goals. Local food production is becoming a valued way to supply schools, growers markets, co-ops, and supermarkets yet the impact of a fully-integrated network of local producers, distributors and sellers has yet to be maximized to create a completely local economy. Such localization would require building much-needed bridges between grassroots growers, wholesalers, educational institutes, retail stores, government agencies and nonprofit organizations and infrastructure development.

**Marketing** – In bringing stakeholders together, we would assess the gaps of information and technical know-how that have created existing marketing barriers among the state’s agricultural communities. We would examine selected crops and products and their marketability and cost-effective distribution within certain regions of the state.

**Training & Technical Assistance** – Through several grants, AFSC has begun a series of demonstration sites for sustainable farming models. Working in collaboration with the New Mexico State University Bernalillo County Extension Program, we have set out to create farms as learning sites, where curriculum and hands-on experimentation flesh out degrees of “sustainability” that are possible among community farms. Added access to larger growers and information about market demands would deepen our process of finding the balance between

market needs and local productivity. As we discover market and production thresholds, it would allow us to provide the nuanced training and technical support for local scale-up initiatives.

**Innovative Models** – As networks are built and markets and productivity are tested, we would begin to distinguish the links and connections that make for innovative models and be able to share them with other Regional Lead Teams in the nation. We would thoroughly document how relationships were established, and how exchange programs emerged from joint discussions, and report on the qualities inherent in successful collaborations.

Some groundwork has already been laid in New Mexico around the local food shed. SYSCO Corporation conducted a study with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture to find out how much local produce was being grown. After this study, SYSCO informed growers what would be needed for the company to purchase their products. SYSCO is implementing a statewide marketing network called “Born in New Mexico” but has failed in finding the right growers. From the grower’s perspective, La Montanita Food Co-op has created a regional food shed program in New Mexico to increase grower access to distributors. As a part of this food shed program, La Montanita built a storage facility and manages a truck for food pick-up. Farmers and ranchers throughout this region can either sell their products direct to Co-op locations or utilize the services of their Cooperative Distribution Center’s (CDC) warehouse to expand their markets and reduce transport costs. The CDC also offers local producers post-harvest and production cooler/freezer space and storage.

### **Scope of Work**

Given the research done by distributors and the efforts made by growers to reach bigger markets, a mutual need for ways to connect people within the food system remains a pressing concern. Our priorities as Regional Lead Team would be to bring people in New Mexico into a shared forum to discuss gaps, set goals on where and how to train growers and develop the local food system in a progressive, step-by-step process.

We see this grant as being part of a three-year scale-up program with several phases. In this initial phase, we want to achieve the following: 1) determine what information already exists about scaling up for local farmers and ranchers and/or collect information to create an inventory of ranchers and farmers within our region; 2) determine among regional participants what are the gaps and/or opportunities within the food shed as it currently exists; 3) find the linkages to fill the gaps with a mind to foster valued chain development, where the entire farm system—from food production to processing and distribution—works efficiently, to capacity, and responds effectively to market changes.

## **Priorities**

- Convene regional meetings of growers, ranchers, grassroots organizers, scaled-up retailers and potential funders
- Assess information and technical skills gaps, and organizational challenges faced by regional farmers and ranchers in reaching larger markets
- Identify barriers for retailers and buyers that deter them from buying locally
- Develop a pilot program of grower-readiness trainings for a grower with the potential to scale-up
- Develop shared strategies to increase access to good food for vulnerable children, families and communities by building partnerships with retailers and food service groups

## **A Regional Community of Collaborators**

Key partner: New Mexico Acequia Association (administrative and logistical, food assessments resource; identifying farmers and ranchers)

Collaborators: E-merging Communities (community farms); University of New Mexico (business partners training); NMSU Bernalillo County Cooperative Extension Service (technical assistance and training resources); Rio Grande Community Development Center & South Valley Small Business Incubator (business development, infrastructure for scaling up); Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association (ranching community), Sustainable Agriculture Science Center at Alcalde (research and training); Craig Mapel, Dept of Agriculture (government representation).

## **Activities**

- Contact growers, distributors and begin administrative organization of regional meetings, and set-up regional steering committee (Sept-Dec. 2008)
- Convene one meeting of regional farmers and ranchers to assess their needs concerning how to scale up their businesses and production (January-February 2009)
- Convene one meeting of regional retailers and buyers to assess what barriers they face in buying from local growers (February-March 2009)
- Convene a joint meeting among farmers, ranchers and buyers and retailers, with technical experts, addressing the bridges that can be built to expand local networks and resources (March-April 2009)
- Out of the regional meetings, a smaller subcommittee would begin to set criteria for a pilot program (Jan. 2008-Aug. 2009)
- Report on challenges, successes of networking efforts for other Regional Lead Teams to learn from (July-August 2009)

## **Results and Outcomes**

- Information about making good food more locally-based is exchanged and new knowledge is gained
- A new inventory of farmers, ranchers, distributors, retailers, and food service groups is created through a shared vision of maximizing local entrepreneurship
- A pilot program is developed, with a focus on providing grower-ready trainings in regional areas for farmers and ranchers ready for scaling up their businesses and production
- A report on the findings of these gatherings and recommendations will be distributed to partners and other Regional Lead Teams

## **Potential Members of the Regional Steering Committee**

Espanola Valley Farm (grower); SYSCO Corporation and/or Bueno Foods (distributors); Robyn Seydel, La Montanita Co-op (retailer or food service); Paula Garcia, New Mexico Acequia Association (regional representative); Don Bustos and Sayrah Namaste of American Friends Service Committee; Carlos Salazar of Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association; Pati Martinson of Taos County Economic Development Corporation; and Edmund Gomez of Alcalde Science Center.

## **Organizational Capacity**

AFSC New Mexico has two permanent staff members who head organizational operations of our programs in the state. Don Bustos will serve as project leader. Our key partner, the New Mexico Acequia Association, will compile a list of participants from their database, organize and facilitate these regional meetings and provide logistical support staff for this project.

Complementary funding sources will come from in-kind contributions from other project partners and pending grants. Collaborating community farms can be used as demonstration sites for grower-readiness trainings when the pilot program is developed. We have two pending grants with USDA that involve similar populations that could be engaged in the work of a Regional Lead Team to help farmers and ranchers scale-up and be a new source of good food. Collaborators such as La Montanita Co-op would also work with us to provide infrastructural needs for local growers.

To sustain our role as Regional Lead Team, we would continue to develop networks among farmers and ranchers in the region. By helping the Regional Steering Committee articulate clear goals and lead a network, we could find ways to replicate this pilot program once it is developed.