

**A report on issues facing Maine farmers and strategies
for private philanthropy.**

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INTRODUCTION

Maine has a vibrant history of agriculture. Open fields, farmhouses, and barns still characterize the Maine landscape. As market forces, demographics, and cultural influences have changed the role of agriculture in Maine's communities, many farmers in Maine are changing the way they operate.

Some farmers are incorporating organic techniques; others are making their raw products into jams, cheese, chutneys, ice cream and other value-added products; and a number of conventional farmers are testing new innovations that may allow them to survive turbulent commodity markets. Still, the challenges are great: Maine farmers compete within national and global food systems; Maine has limited processing and distribution infrastructure; and farmland values have skyrocketed as second home owners and commuters seek rural settings.

In the spring of 2006, a research project was conceived to explore the state of agriculture in Maine and determine what strategies would help farmers become more viable. The following report discusses the primary issues facing Maine farmers and short and long term strategies for private philanthropy. This is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory, but rather to provide an entry point and a foundation for further exploration. Furthermore, information will continue to be collected, including data on the economic impact of sustainable farming in Maine.

Interviews were conducted with farmers, staff from nonprofits that serve farmers, and government officials that oversee programs that provide assistance to farmers. Relevant literature was also reviewed. For a list of the individuals and organizations consulted, please refer to Appendix A.

This report is intended to serve as a resource for those who wish to support agriculture in Maine through private philanthropic investment.

BACKGROUND

According to the 2005 New England Agricultural Statistics yearbook, Maine had 1.31 million acres of land in farms.¹ The agriculture industry contributes \$1.2 billion to the Maine economy.² Over half of the farms in Maine are less than 100 acres, and less than one percent are larger than 2,000 acres.³

In 2002, the top five Maine counties in agricultural sales were: Aroostook with 26%, Androscoggin with 21%, Washington with 9%, Kennebec with 7%, and Penobscot with

¹ Rod McCormick. Email correspondence. 2007

² John Rebar. "Agriculture – Sustainable Business Management. University of Maine Cooperative Extension *Plan of Work* Issue Area Needs Assessment, 2007–2011."

<<http://www.umext.maine.edu/POW/POW2007/issuepapers/Agriculture-Sustainable%20Business%20Management.doc>>

³ Rod McCromick. Email correspondence. 2007

6%.⁴ The top Maine agriculture sectors in 2005 were: other livestock and poultry (total livestock , less milk, eggs, and aquaculture) at 22%, dairy products at 20%, potatoes at 17%, eggs at 11%, other fruits and vegetables at 8%, greenhouse and nursery at 7.5%, and blueberries at 4%.⁵

From a national and international perspective, Maine is the largest producer of brown eggs and wild blueberries in the world. It ranks eighth in the country in production of potatoes and second for maple syrup. It ranks second in New England in milk and livestock production.⁶

FARMING PRACTICES

Maine agriculture can be categorized into traditional and specialty markets. Traditional or conventional farmers include those who sell in the commodity markets. They operate the larger farms and typically grow potatoes, apples, grain, broccoli, and berries. Additionally, many of Maine's dairy and poultry farms use traditional farming practices.

For these traditional or conventional farmers, prices are dropping, contracts are worse, and equipment costs and other inputs are going up. Furthermore, Maine farmers are now competing in the global marketplace. Anything sold as a commodity is also grown in other countries: for example, the Chinese are growing apples and our close neighbors, the Canadians, are major exporters of potatoes.

Specialty markets, including value added and organic, while still a small percentage of total production, are increasing significantly here in Maine. Fiber, flowers, seedlings, and wines join the produce at farmers' markets, country fairs, and food co-ops. Our report primarily focuses on the challenges these farmers face. Many interviewers felt that selling into specialty markets was the only way for Maine farmers to turn a profit.

Worthy of special note, is Maine's dairy industry. Because of the volatility of milk prices, the dairy industry in Maine is moving into more value added products: for example, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. Cheese makers in general are a huge growing sector with lots of potential and huge demand. The Maine Cheese Guild includes cow, sheep, and goat cheeses. Many dairy farms are also transitioning to organic; twenty percent of Maine's dairy farms are organic.⁷

Maine's growing organic sector deserves additional comment. According to an Organic Trades Association survey, nationwide organic sales have averaged 15 percent to 20 percent growth over the past eight years. Even more striking, the same survey reveals that the percentage of organic sales in the overall market has grown from eight-tenths of a percent in 1997 to almost 2.5 percent in 2005.

⁴ USDA. "State Fact Sheets: Maine." 31 Aug. 2006. <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/ME.htm>>

⁵ Rod McCormick. Email correspondence. 2007

⁶ *Maine Department of Agriculture*. "Welcome to Maine Department of Agriculture." <<http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/index.shtml>>

⁷ Russell Libby. 2006. Interview

In 1972, there were 27 certified organic farms in Maine. Three hundred were certified last year. Today there are 315 organically certified farms covering 25,000 acres.⁸ Mary Ellen Johnston formerly at the Department of Agriculture stated that while only a small percentage of farmers are certified organic, she thought 10% would qualify. Many farmers, Johnston believes, try to use fewer chemicals and are doing better with soil management and using natural methods like “no till.” Furthermore, a large number of farmers report they are not spraying with conventional chemicals. They explain they do not need certification; their customers are willing to trust a farmer from whom they buy directly.

While the organic market continues to grow, so does a relatively new trend, buying locally. The “buy local” trend is, in part, a response to the adoption of organic practices by multi-national farms and the organic market demand by food distributors. Wal-mart now sells organic food and Earthbound Farms, the company with the E-coli contaminated spinach that caused a nationwide recall this year, is owned by Natural Section Foods, which operates 24,000 organic acres in New Zealand, Mexico, and the United States.⁹ A local label is increasingly becoming important to consumers who are environmentally and socially conscientious. Farms in Maine are benefiting as Maine consumers choose to shop at farm stands, farmers markets, and health food stores over the supermarket chains that may sell organic food, but carry little or no locally grown food.

For further information, readers may wish to review “Understanding the Dichotomy Between Industrial Agriculture and Sustainable Agriculture: Types and Characteristics of Maine Farms.” This report explores the character, extent, and degree of sustainability of agriculture in Maine. Copies may be obtained from the Department of Resource Economics and Policy at the University of Maine.

ISSUES

Affordable Land

"Who will grow our food?" ask supporters of Maine agriculture as they look to the future. Consumers who value local food are concerned when they learn that half the farms and nearly half the farmland in the state are owned by people who are 60 years or older. Maine needs new farmers to keep the state's farmland in production. There are currently about 7,000 farms in Maine. Based on an average career of 35 years we will need at least 200 new farmers each year.¹⁰

Most of the practitioners interviewed cite the cost of land as the number one inhibitor for preserving existing farmland and for those who want to start farming. In the last ten years, 160,000 acres of Maine's best farmland were converted to residential and

⁸ Craig Crosby. “The Growth of Organic Farming.” *Morning Sentinel*, 21 Sep. 2006

<<http://morningsentinel.maintoday.com/news/local/3130765.shtml>>

⁹ Kim Severson. “Why Roots Matter More.” *The New York Times*. 15 Nov. 2006.

¹⁰ *CEI*. “The Future of Maine Farming.” <<http://www.ceimaine.org/content/view/115/164/>>

commercial use. An additional 250,000 acres are estimated to change hands in the next decade as farmers age.¹¹

Those who wish to live in rural settings often desire the same qualities that farmers need: affordable, accessible land with ample sun. Many find the open spaces of fields and the traditional farm houses and barns to be appealing. Furthermore, local land use regulations often encourage development in rural settings. Development pressures have driven the cost of farmland beyond the reach of most individuals who wish to get into farming.

Processing

Only a small portion of the cost of most food paid for by a consumer is retained by the grower. Much of the price goes to intermediaries, especially if the food is processed. Value can be added by farmers through processing on site or at a local facility.

Maine's challenges around processing are complicated and costly. One article in *Maine Agriculture TODAY*, a newsletter dedicated to Maine's agriculture community, spoke directly about meat processing, but the same could be said about other food products. The 2006 article states, "A lack of slaughter and processing facilities meeting federal inspection standards has restricted the growth of Maine's livestock industries and the development of Maine-produced, value-added specialty products containing meat or poultry." In other words, Maine growers are seriously disadvantaged by our lack of agricultural infrastructure.

Maine Farmers are currently trucking livestock around the country to reach USDA certified processing facilities. Small poultry producers, once supplying farmers markets and selling directly to local consumers, are no longer allowed to sell birds butchered on site due to stricter regulations. Many have stopped raising poultry. Potatoes are sent out of state to be made into french fries and potato chips. Wheat grown in Maine was once sent to Canada for milling and then sent back to Maine to be used by a Maine bakery, Borealis Bread. Seventy percent of Maine lobster is shipped to Canada for processing.¹²

Even when a region does have a processing facility, sometimes the scale does not work for Maine's smaller specialty farms. Jim Cook, of Skylandia Farms in Aroostook County, tried to make organic potato patties at Naturally Potatoes, a plant in nearby Mars Hill. He was told that he would need to bring in 10,000 pounds of potatoes to make it work for them. He had less than 1,000 pounds and, therefore, was not able to try out a new value added product.

Business Support

Like any business, operating a farm successfully takes expertise in finance, marketing, and planning. Developing a successful brand, effectively reaching customers,

¹¹ John Piotti. Maine Farmland Trust Proposal to the Maine Community Foundation. 10 Oct. 2006

¹² Bob Moore. "Fishing 'Maine Lobster.'" *The Working Waterfront*. 21 Nov. 2006
<<http://www.workingwaterfront.com/article.asp?storyID=20051102>>

understanding debt management, and knowing how to get financial assistance have become necessary knowledge in the competitive food industry. One interviewee noted that while farmers are good in many things, they often are not good business people.

Access to financing is critically important for a farmer who wishes to expand his or her production capacity or to implement innovations. Federal and state supported grant programs are available, but require sophisticated applications. Kerri Sands, a farm development specialist at Coastal Enterprises, Inc., commented seriously that “a farmer couldn’t do (an application) and run the farm.” This is especially true with Maine’s smaller farms that are often operated by just a few individuals.

There are programs in Maine that provide farmers with good business assistance, but many of the programs are under funded, and therefore, limiting the number of farmers who can be reached. For entry farmers, in particular, there is very limited technical assistance for farm-specific business development. Furthermore, research conducted by the State’s Local Ag Development Task Force revealed that farmers lack information on what support is actually available to them.

Distribution

Specialty farmers, including organic and those that produce value added products, use a variety of venues for selling and marketing their goods. The best price, but most labor intensive, is obtained through farmer to consumer contact. This contact is usually through a farmers market or farm stand, but many farmers are selling online as well. Health food stores and co-ops provide a lower rate, but pay higher than most supermarkets. Compared to supermarkets, co-ops and health food stores also tend to require smaller quantities and because they have simpler management structures due to size, they will generally negotiate and communicate more easily with farmers.

Restaurants and larger institutions: for example, hospitals, schools, and colleges, provide good prices and are reliable customers. Both markets are increasingly aware of consumer demand and the superior taste and nutritional value of locally grown and raised food. While still a desirable venue for a farmer, larger institutions often require coordination among a number of farmers in terms of types of products, quantity, availability, and distribution. Restaurants on the other hand, can change menus to reflect the availability of different foods and can accommodate relatively small quantities.

Basic geography can be a challenge for a farmer. Maine is 33,265 square miles¹³ with the northern area of the state being less populated than the coastal and southern areas of the state. It can take a farmer in northern Maine six hours to bring his or her produce to a Portland market where they can receive a premium price. Storage capability also becomes important when a farmer has to transport products or store produce for any length of time (especially when dealing with Maine’s fluctuating temperatures throughout the seasons).

¹³ Encyclopedia Britannica Online < <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9111241/Maine>>

Technology

Farms in Maine are tiny in comparison to the large farms in other agricultural regions in the United States. Most commercial farm equipment is designed for conventional, large-scale farming. While machinery in some cases reduces costs in the long run, it is initially very costly and many of the harvesters and attachments or implements are overkill for Maine's smaller farms.

If Maine farmers could find compact machinery, appropriate to the size of the smaller farm, they could grow more, spend more time marketing their products, and suffer less from physical damage caused by intense manual labor.

Innovative technologies could also extend the harvest season or improve storage facilities. Many Maine consumers who seek locally grown food expect the season to end in the fall. With the growing period in Maine so short, any extension of the season would benefit a farmer as he or she meets the growing demand for locally grown foods. Early and late produce also command higher prices.

For farmers growing produce for the commodity market, improved storage facilities could allow them to sell when the prices are high, rather than be held to the mercy of a wholesaler who is seeking the lowest prices.

Culture

Common public opinion holds that agriculture in Maine is dying or dead. Many believe that farms in Maine can no longer play a contributing role to Maine's economy. This is certainly not the case. As stated earlier, agriculture in Maine contributes \$1.2 billion to the economy. There are also economic benefits that are difficult to calculate. For example, in tourism, visitors appreciate the open space and unique character and landscape. In that way, farmland contributes to the "Maine brand."

Some farmers are facing difficulties directly from their neighbors. New residents may bring different values into a farming region.¹⁴ They may not like the smell of manure or fertilizer or the sound of farm equipment early in the morning. Maine's right to farm law does protect farmers from nuisance lawsuits, but neighbors can certainly create an undesirable environment for a farmer – especially if a neighbor becomes involved in town land use planning.

Commonly referred to as, "the most independent people in Maine," farmers have their own cultural challenges to overcome. Cooperative arrangements hold significant potential for farmers. Sharing costs in distribution, marketing, and other business functions could create increased efficiencies and open up new opportunities for expansion. Unfortunately, farming cooperatives have not been common in Maine. Mary Ellen Johnston, formerly of the Department of Agriculture, went so far as to say, "Co-ops have had a bleak history in Maine." She believes this lack of progress is because of the

¹⁴ Mary Ellen Johnston. 2006. Interview.

challenges around competition and being in business with someone else. Despite this bleak history things may be changing; three out of fifteen 2006 Agricultural Development Grants were awarded to cooperative efforts.¹⁵ Furthermore, a room full of interested farmers attended a co-op conference organized by the Department of Agriculture, the Cooperative Extension, and USDA in 2005.¹⁶ Jane Livingston, a cooperative specialist, knows of two cooperatives that formed as a result. Farmers need only look to fishermen; Maine fishermen are well experienced in establishing cooperatives for distribution and marketing purposes. While still a challenge, cooperatives may offer new promise for Maine farmers.

Those in conventional farming can be resistant to trying other practices, even practices that may be more profitable. The resistance may be a matter of economics. When a farmer makes huge capital investments in a farm, like in a harvester or cultivator, he/she has such huge debt that it seems impossible to get out. Another factor is certainly based on perceptions of organic and specialty farming. There is immense pride in farming; some farms have been in families for generations. To change, may be viewed as giving up or selling out. Russell Libby of MOFGA gave testament, “There are farmers that will never change. They would rather go out of business.”

STRATEGIES

The following are proposed strategies to address many of the previously discussed challenges. We believe in partnering with organizations that are experienced in providing services to farmers. Additionally, while a few of the strategies are new, we also encourage enhancing current strategies that are effective. Like many of the issues, the approaches often overlap.

Farm Cooperatives

Cooperatives have the potential to provide great opportunities for farmers. Small blueberry growers could band together and sell directly to clients rather than into the wholesale markets that pay less. Poultry farmers could secure funds and build a certified processing facility. Produce farmers could gain cost efficiencies in distribution, storage, and marketing.

Despite the potential benefits, farm cooperatives are not common in Maine. In our exploration of the formation of farm cooperatives in Maine, we learned that for some, a more informal form of working together can be the best arrangement. Jim Cook, an organic farmer in Aroostook County, works with seven other farmers to distribute their produce. Though working cooperatively, the farmers decided not to formalize their structure. We also learned there is very little technical assistance services available in Maine to help farmers establish a formal cooperative or to learn more about working cooperatively. Jane Livingston, a private consultant, seems to be the cooperative expert in the state. She is well networked and receives many inquiries. Occasionally, she is

¹⁵ *Maine Department of Agriculture*. 2006 Agricultural Development Grant Awards
<http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/mpd/business/grantsandloans/ADGawards.html>>

¹⁶ Mary Ellen Johnston. 2006. Interview.

hired to provide her expertise, but for the most part, her advice is free and thus limited. The Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) in Massachusetts is the nearest organization with a primary function of supporting cooperatives. CDI has done work in Maine, but charges a fee for their services. The USDA does have a cooperative specialist, but since USDA has not funded cooperative programs in recent years, the specialist refers cooperative inquiries to other resources.¹⁷ The Maine Department of Agriculture has limited cooperative resources, but primarily serves as a link to access federal programs.

Jane Livingston believes there is quite a bit of misinformation or lack of information, or even anti-communist sentiments, about cooperatives. She finds that once people understand how they function and what the benefits are, the idea sells itself. Livingston would like to organize seminars where farmers could connect by video access around specific cooperative topics. She described wanting to organize one around Agri-tourism.¹⁸ She also envisions doing a series with a goal of identifying groups of farms that are ready to form cooperatives. Another of her ideas was for a conference that would bring Maine farmers together to talk about the most innovative ways cooperatives can form. Bringing farmers together with fishermen who have formed cooperatives would likely be another constructive strategy.

The other major barriers for starting cooperatives have to do with equity. They often need huge infusions of funding at the beginning, especially in Maine where most of the issues are around processing and storage. However, smaller amounts of funding could be used to leverage funds that are available at the national level. Feasibility studies and business plans, not easy for farmers to produce for example, are often required for federal grant applications.

Potential Grantees:

Cooperative Development Institute (Jane Livingston is a CDI consultant)
Maine Department of Agriculture (piggy back on Agriculture Development Grants)

Affordable Land

Most land trusts play a role in preserving farmland. The Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), however, is the primary institution in Maine whose mission is to preserve and protect Maine farmland. MFT helps to negotiate the terms of easements for local land trusts, which often hold the easements. Funding for the easements has come from the Land for Maine's Future, the USDA Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, foundations, and private individuals. To date, MFT has helped to purchase or secure donated agricultural easements on 9,700 acres.¹⁹

¹⁷ John Sheehan. 2006. Interview.

¹⁸ Apparently there is a lot of interest in agritourism: i.e., stay on the farm, eat food grown on the farm, and help out on the farm.

¹⁹ John Piotti. 2006. Interview.

The Maine Farmland Trust recently set a goal of protecting another 100,000 acres in the next five to seven years. The MFT will position itself to purchase farmland, put the land in agriculture easement, and then sell the land at affordable rates to prospective farmers.²⁰ It is an ambitious initiative, but has been tested in Maine. An individual farmer in Hancock County has been purchasing farmland on his own for a number of years. He too has put the land in easement and then sold the land to individuals who want to farm. Often he subdivides the land and sells lots that are less desirable for farming at higher rates to offset the lower prices he asks for the farm lots. The strategy holds great promise for farmland preservation and for providing affordable land for prospective farmers.

Funding could target direct acquisition of land or go toward agricultural easements. MFT itself needs operational support, so that its staff can work with sellers and buyers, be on the lookout for appropriate properties, and secure the funds needed for acquisition.

Potential Grantees:

Maine Farmland Trust
Local Land Trusts

Business Assistance

There are many organizations in Maine that provide technical assistance to farmers. However, many of the programs reach relatively few farmers because of limited funding. The funding limitations impact both the assistance they can provide and their ability to educate farmers about the services they offer.

Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI) has a number of programs to help farmers with the business aspect of developing an agricultural enterprise. CEI's Image Building Concepts designs farm logos, labels, brochures, and business cards. Farms for the Future, a state program currently administered by CEI, provides business planning and grant funding to farmers that own and operate at least five acres. The program has a competitive application process and is for farmers that want to go in a new direction and become more economically viable. Each farm establishes a team of 3 to 6 advisors and receives a small amount of money to cover expenses (research, mileage, books, accommodations, consultants, etc.) related to working on a business plan. Once the plan is developed, the farm can compete for grants that will support 25%, or up to \$25,000, of the cost of implementation.²¹ CEI also operates the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project that provides information, training, tools and resources to recently resettled refugee farmers and farm workers living in Maine.²²

CEI's farm programs all rely on soft money. In addition to supporting the current programs, Image Building Concepts could be expanded to include promotional writing and website design. The Farms for the Future is noted by many as a great program, but it relies on bond funds, which does not insure its continuation in the future. It should also be expanded to provide assistance to beginning farmers.

²⁰ John Piotti. Maine Farmland Trust Proposal to the Maine Community Foundation. 10 Oct. 2006

²¹ Kerri Sands. 2006. Interview.

²² CEI Website < <http://www.ceimaine.org/content/view/115/164/>>

Local Resource Conservation and Development Councils, in addition to providing education on farming practices, also can provide business training for farmers. For example, Threshold to Maine RC&D has provided the business planning for a coalition in southern Maine promoting the sale of locally produced goat meat to ethnic populations.²³ Time and Tide RC&D hosts an annual conference on grass farming and pasture raised livestock.²⁴ Heart of Maine RC&D offers a business planning course called “Tilling the Soil” two times a year. It relies on funds from the Department of Agriculture, which have been severely impacted by budget cuts over the past four years.²⁵

The value of peer to peer learning cannot be underestimated. There are venues for farmers to gather and share growing tips and practices (e.g., MOFGA’s Common Ground Fair and Farmer to Farmer Conference) and some business learning comes during informal networking at any event where farmers gather. However, more opportunities for intentional peer learning around business practices could be very useful, especially for entry level farmers. MOFGA, Maine Women’s Agricultural Network, and the RC&D councils would be appropriate conveners.

Potential Grantees:

- Coastal Enterprises, Inc
- Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association
- Maine Women's Agricultural Network
- Resource Conservation and Development Councils

Distribution

Farmers distribute their products in numerous ways. The following strategies address the challenges faced by smaller farms.

A farmer is able to realize the best price when he or she sells directly to a customer. This is most commonly done through farmers markets and farm stands. A farm stand is usually run by one farmer and can often be found along the side of a busy road or directly on a farm. Farmers markets involve any number of farms and are a growing venue for locally grown food. Sellers congregate at an advertised location, days, and times to sell their products. In 1971, there was one farmers' market in the state; now there are more than 60.²⁶

Deanne Herman, Marketing Manager at the Maine Department of Agriculture, said she is receiving more and more calls from towns that want farmers markets. Cities are increasingly seeing farmers markets as part of their downtown revitalization plans. These towns, knowing that some farmers markets do not survive, are asking for assistance in doing it right.

²³ Threshold to Maine RC&D Website < <http://www.thresholdtomaine.org/>>

²⁴ Time and Tide RC&D Website < <http://www.timeandtide.org/>>

²⁵ Mary Ellen Johnston. 2007. Email Correspondence.

²⁶ Craig Crosby. “The Growth of Organic Farming.” *Morning Sentinel*, 21 Sep. 2006
<<http://morningsentinel.maine.com/news/local/3130765.shtml>>

Farmers markets around Maine vary in the number of farmers, food products offered, governance structure, management structure, customer base, and success. Herman would like to see workshops that show farmers and towns the benefits and then how to go about setting up viable markets. She mentioned the author of “The New Farmers’ Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers, and Communities” as a speaker and resource person.

There are strategies to make farmers markets more financially accessible for low income people, while still giving farmers a good price for their products. The Senior Farm Share program links income eligible seniors with farmers who receive a prepayment of \$100 for an amount of produce equal to that value.²⁷ The two parties agree on delivery arrangements. Often the delivery site is at a farmers market. Because of limited funding, Senior Farm Share turns away an equal number of individuals as it is able to enroll.²⁸

Farmers can accept food stamps, but need a remote access system to process the food stamp EBT cards. The systems cost between \$800 and \$1000.²⁹ (The Maine Equal Justice Partners’ website states that farmers can use a paper voucher if they do not have the machines.)

Another distribution method, Community Supported Agriculture farms, or CSAs are becoming increasingly popular in Maine. There are currently 75 known CSAs each serving about 45 to 50 members each.³⁰ A farm provides a weekly “share” of food to an individual or family. The consumer most often pays a fee during the winter for the entire season, which supports the farmer’s startup and continuing costs for the year. Like shareholders in the corporate world, CSA members share in the risk of the farm business. If a crop is good, the share is generous. If the crop is poor, the share is smaller. MOFGA has become a major proponent for CSAs, mostly by helping to share best practices. MOFGA director Russell Libby would like to have his organization help farmers work together to provide a more comprehensive share. He described shares that would contain vegetables, fruit, meat, bread, cheese, eggs, and milk. Many consumers would find this pay-ahead, one-stop shopping to be very convenient and appealing.

Farm Fresh Connection (FFC) is a model distribution program for connecting farms to institutions in the midcoast area. FFC has successfully brought more locally grown food into Bates and Bowdoin colleges. No small feat, this took several years of negotiations and planning. Heather Albert-Knopp who works with Healthy Acadia, a Healthy Maine Partnership, to connect farmers with schools in Hancock County said that it would be beneficial for her work if FFC had the resources to expand their service area.

Potential Grantees:
Farm Fresh Connection

²⁷ *Maine Department of Agriculture*. “Maine Senior Farmshare Information for Seniors.” <
<http://www.getrealgetmaine.com/connect/senior.html#benefits>>

²⁸ Heather Albert-Knopp. 2006. Interview.

²⁹ Deanne Herman. 2006. Interview.

³⁰ Jean English. 2004. “Community Supported Agriculture: Variations on the Theme” MOFGA website

Maine Department of Agriculture
Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association

Processing

No one would argue that it is critically important for food to be processed safely; however, current regulations are seriously restricting Maine farmers, and in some cases, putting them out of business. While some of the challenges need to be dealt with at the policy level, there are measures and methods that can be employed to accommodate the circumstances of Maine's farmers.

Farm cooperatives show promise for farmers willing to work together to plan and secure funds for processing facilities. One such effort was recently awarded an Agricultural Development Grant from the State. The Cooperative Poultry Producers were awarded a \$30,000 grant to "conduct a feasibility study and develop an agricultural cooperative, providing a broad range of services to Maine's poultry producers, including bulk purchasing, marketing, public advocacy and a State inspected processing facility." Another grant was awarded that will greatly increase distribution efficiencies: "to acquire an existing building in Aroostook County to house, handle and load-out cattle as part of a program to increase the sales of beef cattle through a cooperative marketing program."³¹

Adequate processing facilities are a limitation for produce farmers as well as livestock farmers. Jim Cook of Skylandia Farm described his challenge of trying to work with a processing facility that could not accommodate his relatively small scale production of organic potato patties. He explained that a shared-use commercial kitchen is exactly what he and the other farmers he works with need.

One example of such a kitchen is planned for Bucksport. The Bucksport commercial kitchen is intended to serve specialty food producers and to allow farmers to start or expand their own food business as a way to add value. The facility will provide services that will allow small food businesses at affordable rates to process, prepare, package, and ship value added food products. Small business workshops and ongoing training will also be available. The kitchen is a project of the Town of Bucksport and the Washington Hancock Community Agency. Funds are being raised with a goal of opening in the fall of 2007.³²

A few other shared use kitchens are planned in Maine. In Sanford, the York County Community Action Corporation is remodeling a large warehouse with existing walk-in refrigerators into a licensed, modern facility with commercial ovens, storage space and production-line capacity.³³ The Cobscook Bay Resource Center in Eastport is constructing a new building for a marketing co-op and community kitchen facility that

³¹ *Maine Department of Agriculture*. 2006 Agricultural Development Grant Awards
<http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/mpd/business/grantsandloans/ADGawards.html>>

³² Keith Small. Interview. 2006

³³ *York County Office University of Maine Cooperative Extension*. "Extension Horizons." Nov-Dec 2006
<http://www.umaine.edu/umext/york/Horizons/Nov_Dec2004.htm>

will assist local people engaged in production of both seafood and agricultural food products.³⁴ Another similar kitchen is planned in Franklin County.³⁵

Potential Grantees:

Maine Department of Agriculture (piggy back on Agriculture Development Grants)
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
CAP Agencies or other nonprofits developing shared use kitchens

Technology

Supporting the development of new technologies for farmers is a bit difficult for private philanthropy because most innovations come from individuals or for-profit entities. Because a number of practitioners identified lack of appropriate technology for Maine's farms as a key issue, and because there appears to be little investment here, a couple of suggestions are offered.

Several years ago, the Maine Community Foundation awarded a grant that allowed Elliot Coleman of Four Season Farm to develop a lettuce harvester for smaller-scale farmers. The grant was awarded to MOFGA that in turn contracted with Coleman. Coleman has also developed tools and practices that allow him to grow vegetables, like carrots, beets, and greens during the winter months. Similar innovations could be encouraged through targeted support to MOFGA or the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Potential Grantees:

Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association
University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Community Perceptions

Mainers have a misperception about the economic importance of Maine agriculture. The general public also has a limited understanding of the nutritional and flavor advantages of locally grown food.

Dr. Mark Lapping, a professor at the Muskie School, stated that in order to add value to agriculture and keep family farms prosperous, we must equip the next generation with basic skills. School gardens can be an excellent way to help young people learn gardening skills and value locally grown food. School gardens seem to be popping up everywhere. Some schools simply have small gardens that give children experience in a garden and provide limited vegetables to the school kitchen. Others have a very developed program, like that of the Mount Desert Island High School where students use the garden as an outdoor classroom, provide produce for the cafeteria, sell sandwiches made with their produce, and sell excess vegetables to the public.

³⁴ Cobscook Bay Resource Center Website <<http://www.cobscook.org>>

³⁵ Keith Small. Interview. 2006

Some school gardens will thrive and others will barely make it through a season. Best practices appear to be: strong, charismatic leadership; agriculture in the curriculum; agriculture as part of school policy; paid students to care for gardens during the summer; many volunteers; other members of school faculty and administration committed. Tools and equipment are usually donated. Support for coordinating the start-up of a school garden would be a good investment. If the best practices are implemented, the garden will be fully integrated into the school and may not need an ongoing paid position to keep it functioning well. Bringing schools together to share learnings can also be valuable.

Farm to school programs, whereby, to the extent practicable, local farms supply fresh foods for the schools, are another strategy worthy of consideration. These programs are praised for both their economic and nutritional benefits. They also build community understanding and value of local agriculture. Certainly bringing fresh produce into schools helps to promote healthy eating. Serving locally grown foods in schools is also viewed as building the consumer base for local farms.³⁶

The Maine Farmland Trust is well poised to take the lead on many of the community planning challenges that agriculture in Maine is faced with. John Piotti, the new executive director has had extensive experience in his home town passing innovative ordinances and polices that foster local farms. MFT could also play a role in promoting the economic benefits of agriculture.

The Eat Local Foods Coalition is a nonprofit coalition of individuals and organizations committed to promoting and increasing in-state consumption of Maine farm products. The Coalition implements programs that are designed to promote the economic, social, health, and environmental benefits of eating locally grown food. It is a very grassroots, barebones operation, but they have a strong web presence, are often at the table during State policy decisions, and are viewed by many practitioners as important players in the local food movement.

Potential Grantees:

- Eat Local Foods Coalition
- Healthy Maine Partnerships
- Local Schools
- Maine Farmland Trust
- Maine School Garden Network

³⁶ Heather Albert-Knopp. 2006. Interview.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS

The following farm practitioners were asked, “What are the major issues facing Maine farmers?” and “What would help farmers or the farming industry in Maine be more viable?” The responses to the latter follow each practitioner’s position and affiliation.

Jim Cook, Aroostook County Farmer, Skylandia Farm

Contact: (207) 895-5234

- Community kitchen/shared use kitchen
- Support with distribution – like a truck and driver
- Support for farmers working cooperatively

Mary Ellen Johnston, former Director of Market and Production Development Division, Maine Department of Agriculture

Contact: johnston@fairpoint.net

- Support formation of co-ops
- Support new technologies for smaller farms
- Influence public opinion about benefit of local farms
- Support the state's "buy local" promotional program
- Provide adequate, long term funding for business assistance programs for farmers

Russell Libby, Executive Director, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Contact: rlibby@mofga.org

- Grow the number of CSA’s (Community Supported Agriculture)
- Get more local food into the school lunch program and other institutions
- Help young farmers get farms and then scale up
- Support farmers markets – help with marketing and securing good space
- Support development of new technologies for smaller farms

Jane Livingston, Independent Consultant, Cooperative Development Institute and other organizations dedicated to the promotion of cooperative ventures

Contact: jane_livingston@verizon.net

- Support the organization of a conference to bring together all stakeholders in cooperative enterprise development
- Promotion and education for cooperatives -- develop an "Orientation" for prospective co-ops to increase efficiencies
- Facilitate the growth of rural cooperatives in the areas of affordable housing, renewable energy, and agricultural distribution

John Piotti, formerly at CEI, now president of Maine Farmland Trust

Contact: jpiotti@mainefarmlandtrust.org

- Change perception of farming in Maine
- Support farmers markets

- Develop affordable strategies for aspiring farmers to own land
- Protect large tracts of land from being split up for development

Keri Sands, Farms for the Future Program Administrator, Coastal Enterprises Institute, Inc.

Contact: kcs@ceimaine.org

- Provide business planning to smaller and newer farms — could pair land and equipment with business planning – have a business consultant that can talk farming and business
- More targeted marketing support
- Appropriate scale technology
- Make land affordable

INTERVIEWS CONT.

The following practitioners were asked targeted questions related to their field of work.

Heather Albert-Knopp, Consultant, Healthy Acadia

Contact: halbertknopp@zwi.net

- School Gardens and Farm to School programs

Deborah Burd, Executive Director, National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

Contact: deb@sustainableagriculture.net

- National policy issues

Deanne Herman, Marketing Manager, Maine Department of Agriculture

Contact: Deanne.Herman@maine.gov

- Farmers Markets

Rod McCormick, Public Information Officer, Maine Department of Agriculture

Contact: rod.mccormick@maine.gov

- Maine agriculture statistics

Jack McKay, President of the Labor Council, Food and Medicine/Union Supported Agriculture (USA)

Contact: info@foodandmedicine.org

- Specific structure of USA

Farmer-Labor-Small Business Alliance

John F. Sheehan, Business & Cooperative Specialist, USDA, Rural Development

Contact: john.sheehan@me.usda.gov

- Cooperative services provided by Rural Development

APPENDIX B

AGRICULTURE RESOURCES: ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

Eat Local Foods Coalition of Maine

Contact: Roger Dioron, info@eatmainefoods.org

The Eat Local Foods Coalition is a nonprofit coalition of individuals and organizations committed to promoting and increasing in-state consumption of Maine farm products. The coalition is a project of the Maine Environmental Policy Institute.

Eat Smart Eat Local

Contact: Paula Day, maaa@gwi.net

A project of the Western Mountains Alliance and the Maine Alternative Agriculture Association intended to encourage large food service providers to buy more local products and to work with farmers to adapt growing and production practices to meet desires of consumers.

Food AND Medicine

Contact: Laura Millay, laura@foodandmedicine.org

Works with a number of farmers to distribute “shares” on a weekly basis throughout the summer to folks who pay a lump sum before the harvest season. Also facilitates a program, Farmer-Labor-Small Business Alliance, that is built on the idea that a strong local economy is good for farms and local businesses.

Food for Maine’s Future

Contact: www.foodformainefuture.org

Seeks to build a just, secure, and democratic food system which protects Maine farmers and the environment from corporate control. Works with farmers and local communities to define their local food systems, and promote sustainable local alternatives in schools and in the fields.

GE Free Maine

Contact: Rob Fish, rob@gefreemaine.org

Works to protect farms from liability issues resulting from genetic contamination and to support alternatives to corporate control of our food supply.

Good Life Center

Contact: Bob St. Peter, information@goodlife.org

Encourages and supports individual and collective efforts to live sustainably into the future. Program offerings include presentations on sustainable farming practices.

Harvest Fund

Contact: Charlie Bernstein, charlie@maineinitiatives.org

A fund of Maine Initiatives, a foundation dedicated to supporting social justice issues. The purpose of the Harvest Fund is to advance sustainable agriculture, end hunger, and renew Maine's family farm heritage.

Healthy Maine Partnerships

Contact: www.healthymainepartnerships.org

The Healthy Maine Partnerships were established with tobacco settlement money. They are dedicated to preventing diseases related to tobacco use, lack of physical activity, and poor nutrition. Of the State’s 31 Partnerships, several have farm to school programs.

Healthy Schools Initiative

Contact: www.healthyschoolsinitiative.org

Promotes healthy eating, school garden projects, and sustainable agriculture in the classroom.

Image Building Concepts

Contact: Gabe McPhail, glm@ceimaine.org

Hosted by CEI, IBC provides assistance in promotional materials like business cards, websites, and logos. Services are primarily for low-income Maine farmers, as well as farmers' markets and farm organizations.

Maine Department of Agriculture, Food & Rural Resources

Contact: Deanne Herman, deanne.herman@maine.gov

The State's lead agency dealing with all aspects of the food system from the field to the table. In addition to providing technical assistance and administering loan programs, it runs the Get Real Get Maine! marketing campaign and the Maine Senior Farm Share program.

Maine Farmland Trust

Contact: John Piotti, jpiotti@mainefarmlandtrust.org

The Trust works to permanently preserve and protect Maine's agricultural land; to assist landowners, land trusts, and municipal and state agencies in identifying and protecting agricultural land; and to make those agricultural lands available for farmers in the future.

Maine FarmLink

Contact: Esther Lacognata, esther@mainefarmlink.org

A farm transfer program hosted by the Maine Farmland Trust that connects farmers seeking farmland with retiring farmers and farm owners who wish to see their agricultural lands remain active.

Maine Farms for the Future

Contact: Kerri Sands, kcs@ceimaine.org

A business assistance and grant program that helps Maine farmers who need help making a change in their business. FFF is a program of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources and is administered by CEI.

Maine Farm Fresh Connection

Contact: Martha Putnam, 207-939-4748

Created to diversify markets accessible to Maine farmers by building relationships among Maine farmers, students, and food buyers in health and educational institutions.

Maine Farm to School Link

Contact: Heather Albert-Knopp, halbertyknopp@zwi.net

This is a project of the Healthy Acadia, a Healthy Communities Partnership, that works with farmers and schools to overcome many of the challenges (delivery, cost, etc.) of working together to provide children with fresh, locally grown and raised food.

Maine Foods Network

Contact: Eric Rector, admin@mainefoods.net

Maine Foods Network's goal is to help put more Maine food on more Maine tables more often. The network aims to make it easier for Maine farmers to find local markets for their produce, as well as for Maine businesses to offer the highest quality local foods to their customers.

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Contact: Russell Libby, rilibby@mofga.org

Founded in 1971, MOFGA has grown from a loose affiliation of farmers and gardeners committed to growing healthy, chemical free food, to an internationally recognized advocate for food production that enhances and protects the ecological as well as economic vitality of rural communities.

Maine Rural Workers Coalition

Contact: Dena Wade, 207-753-1922

Work is primarily with Spanish speaking farm workers. Services include retraining in non agricultural professions, English language classes, and health services.

Maine Senior Farm Share

See Maine Department of Agriculture.

Maine Women's Agricultural Network

Contact: Vivian Holmes, vholmes@umext.maine.edu

A statewide program to enable women to successfully own, operate and support agricultural enterprises. Members benefit from outreach, advocacy, mentoring and accessibility to existing agricultural and entrepreneurial training opportunities.

New American Sustainable Agriculture Project

Contact: Jim Hanna, jeh@ceimaine.org

Run by CEI, helps immigrants with farming knowledge but limited resources start viable businesses. First started in Lewiston, the program has expanded to Portland. The Project offers classroom training and hands on experience.

Resource Conservation and Development Councils

Contact: Heart of Maine RC&D, 207-368-4433; Downeast RC&D, dercd@downeastrcd.com; Time and Tide RC&D, susan.watson@me.usda.gov; Threshold to Maine RC&D, threshold@gwi.net

There are three councils serving different regions of the State. Each provides services dedicated to Maine's rural communities, including technical assistance to farmers on business skills and farming techniques. The councils also administer the Tilling the Soil program of the Department of Agriculture.

Slow Food Chapters

Contact: www.slowfoodusa.org

Members of Slow Food USA, Maine chapters conduct activities that promote the belief that food should taste good; that it should be produced in a clean way that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or human health; and that food producers should receive fair compensation for their work.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension

Contact: Stephen Reiling, reiling@maine.edu

Provides a variety of technical assistance to farmers, primarily around farming practices.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Perry is an independent consultant. Her most recent efforts have included: coordination of a collaborative effort of environmental foundations, capacity assessments of nonprofits, facilitation of focus groups for a new nonprofit, and coordination of a network of nonprofit executive directors. Prior to consulting, she was the director of regional networks at the Maine Community Foundation where she was employed for eight years. She earned a degree in human ecology at the College of the Atlantic. Her focus was in community development and environmental policy.

Andrea grew up in Aroostook County where she developed a strong work ethic by picking potatoes during the harvest break. She picked her first barrel in the first grade and continued with the harvest through high school. Her respect for farmers is rooted in being raised in a culture influenced significantly by agriculture.