

**Moving Food: How Farmers and Nonprofits Are Building Localized Food Systems
for the Twenty-First Century**

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Prepared by:
Mandy Davis and Sona Desai
Intervale Center
180 Intervale Road
Burlington, VT 05401

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Introduction

The Food Hub is a three year project in which the Intervale Center is exploring the marketing challenges and opportunities available to Vermont farmers. Our goal is to offer and collectively implement one or more solution(s) to the marketing, distribution, logistics and/or storage challenges experienced by farmers serving the Champlain Valley food shed in order to more succinctly connect local growers with their neighbors.

We seek to build shorter food distribution channels, ones that can empower smaller growers to reach into bigger markets and return more of every food dollar spent in Vermont to the state's family farmers. We envision a fairer, more localized food chain, one in which farmers not only have more access to market information but have more overall ownership in agricultural marketing. By enabling collaborative marketing, we hope to secure the food supply, enhance consumer recognition and secure equitable pricing from which both farmer and consumer can benefit. Additionally, the Food Hub Project is designed to create a centralized place to house the dialogue around local food supply and demand in Vermont in order to help other community groups, nonprofit organizations and farmers around the state tap into this potential.

As such, the Intervale Center is currently researching the feasibility of supplying the following markets:

- Institutional markets, such as hospital and schools
- Households/businesses through a multi-farm drop box scheme (which was launched in 2008)
- Caterers and restaurants
- Light processing/ Food Enterprise Center

A valuable step in our overall research has been studying other groups that are also working to build localized food distribution networks. Through readings and dialogue, we have gleaned a substantial amount of information from these groups, information that can help us build on their successes and learn from their setbacks. New collaborations are being birthed from these dialogues, as we connect with groups who are interested in working with us to create new, more sustainable and more equitable ways of moving food.

Exploring Institutional Markets: Farm Fresh Connections & the Growers Collaborative

Many organizations throughout the country are interested in improving the connections between large institutional food buyers and local growers in order to shorten the distance food travels, keep local farmers on the land and ensure tastier, more nutritious meals at hospitals, schools, arenas and other institutions. Farm Fresh Connections (FFC) is a program of the Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society, a farmer-led statewide non-profit organization (<http://www.mainefoods.net>). FFC connects local products with public and private institutions, working with menu-planners, food buyers and chefs and sourcing and

delivering the products. As a broker, FFC finds local producers who can meet certain institutional price, quality and delivery requirements. Printed weekly availability lists go to food buyers at institutions and restaurants. The sixty or so farmers who work with FFC receive a higher price than they would receive through traditional wholesale arrangements but a price lower than direct marketing prices, and products brokered through Farm Fresh Connections include fresh produce and livestock products.

In its four years of brokering, FFC has learned that working with institutions can be a slow, arduous process. Their steadfastness and commitment to nonprofit service to farmers were both instrumental to their success as they work to develop ways to link Maine's growers with larger, institutional markets.

The Growers Collaborative is another brokering service that is reaching into larger, institutional markets (<http://www.growerscollaborative.org/>). Touted as a large-scale virtual farmers' market, the Growers Collaborative sells produce grown by California's small farmers to institutions, such as public and private schools, colleges, hospitals and corporate cafeterias in the Sacramento/Bay Area, Southern California and the Central coast region of California. Started in 2004 as a grant-funded social venture of the Community Alliance of Family Farmers, the Growers Collaborative is now financially self-supporting. In 2006, they were working with 35 farmers serving public schools, as well as the Getty Museum, Dream Works Studios and Sony. Their website features an online purchasing system, designed to simplify institutional purchasing by broadcasting current and upcoming availability and allowing both farmers and institutions to see not just what is available, but what is desired by food purchasers.

As an LLC owned by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), the Growers Collaborative has at its heart a social mission. It works with its parent non-profit to increase access to local foods in schools and in lower income communities (<http://www.caff.org/>). Its financial success can serve as a real inspiration, as the Growers Collaborative is a profitable enterprise. However, one obvious difference between the Growers Collaborative, which is servicing the Los Angeles metropolitan area, and the Food Hub is scale; LA has 10 million people, while the entire state of Vermont has a population of a little over 600,000! This large scale – as well as a significant, three-year partnership with the large, sustainability-minded Palo Alto-based food services company, Bon Appetit Management Company – are central to the Growers Collaborative's success. In fact, in July of 2006, the Growers Collaborative was able to purchase a biodeisel-powered truck because of Bon Appetit's support, allowing them to double revenue, buy from additional farmers and supply 15 additional customers (<http://cgnad.com/default.asp?action=article&ID=398>). This kind of partnership, expressed through not just contracts but capital investment, may be instrumental to any food hub's success.

The Growers Collaborative is also unique in that it grew out of CAFF's proven ability to work with institutions to secure higher prices for small farmers and still meet institutional requirements. Indeed, the Growers Collaborative has attracted suppliers, customers and financial backers in part because of CAFF's success connecting small suppliers with

Kaiser Permanente hospitals. By cutting out the distributor and having farmers enter into contracts directly with Kaiser Permanente through deals brokered by CAFF, the hospital can pay farmers up to 20% more than wholesale while still operating within their budget (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/08/06/MNG43KC7751.DTL>). This movement of fresh food between small, often disenfranchised, immigrant and organic growers and Kaiser Permanente has also provided fodder for a great public marketing campaign for the hospital chain. With Kaiser, farmers drop off produce at specified times to a regional distribution hub, where they are loaded directly onto trucks already headed to Kaiser. Financially, there seems to be little difference to Kaiser's overall spending; instead, they are working to accept a little more inefficiency in their system – more suppliers, less regular stream of products, more needed flexibility in menus – in order to make fresh, local food work.

Fletcher Allen Health Care, the largest hospital in Vermont, has also embarked on its own public marketing campaign centered on its purchasing of small amounts of fresh, local food from three farmers, including the Intervale Center's Healthy City. The hospital also hosts a small farmers' market and appears committed to purchasing more local foods as part of their Healthcare Without Harm pledge. Similarly, the University of Vermont publicizes its commitment to serving locally produced foods in its cafeterias, with Sodexo, its food service provider, including a "Local and Organic Foods" section on the Social Responsibility page of its website (<http://uds.uvm.edu/social.html>). As described on this website, it is easy to see how much progress has been made toward more local food purchasing by the university dining service in just two years; indeed, in the first two months of the fall 2006 semester, they bought over \$50,000 worth of Vermont-grown produce and doubled their Vermont dairy, meat and beverage purchases over those of 2005. Sodexo also expresses a desire to work closely with the Intervale Center to secure more locally sourced products for its dining services.

In this way, the opportunity to expand institutional purchasing is evident, and as demonstrated by Farm Fresh Connections and Growers Collaborative, it is possible for nonprofits to play a leading role in connecting this burgeoning demand with reliable supply. It is also clear that nonprofits also have a choice: keep to brokering and distribution services not-for-profit or create a social enterprise that operates on a for-profit basis.

Either way, the Food Hub is poised to exploit the publicized commitments to fresh, local and often organic food made by local institutions. Learning from the Growers Collaborative and Farm Fresh Connections, the Food Hub should start small, acting as a broker to connect farmers with larger markets and helping larger buyers understand that what they are giving up in convenience they are gaining in quality and taste as well as economic and environmental good sense. It may also prove beneficial to seek long-term partnerships with large buyers and encourage them to invest in localized distribution networks as a way of meeting their sustainability goals.

The Tale of Two Produce Brokers: Red Tomato & Eastern Carolina Organics

As demonstrated above, nonprofits are indeed entering the produce brokering world with an emphasis on fresh, organic, local and fair trade products. Red Tomato (RT) and Eastern Carolina Organics (ECO) provide two more examples of how nonprofits can spawn nonprofit as well as for profit, farmer owned brokering and distribution ventures. Red Tomato (RT) is a non-profit organization based in Canton, Massachusetts (<http://www.redtomato.org>). Founded in 1996 by Michael Rozyne of Equal Exchange as a SARE funded project, Red Tomato's mission is to connect farmers and consumers through marketing, trade and education and through a "passionate belief that a family-farm, locally based, ecological, fair trade food system is the way to be the better tomato" (<http://www.redtomato.org>).

Red Tomato successfully markets fresh farm produce to supermarkets and other wholesale markets throughout New England. As a produce broker, RT focuses on product development, logistical coordination and marketing rather than product handling and distribution. Initially, RT attempted to provide product development services, warehousing, trucking, logistical services and marketing (personal communication, 2007). However, within a few years, they recognized that as a small nonprofit enterprise they did not have the physical and financial resources to successfully provide all of these services. In addition, the high costs associated with storing and transporting produce led RT to eliminate those services in favor of providing expanded brokerage services that include creating product value, selling to retailers, coordinating transportation, financing logistics, providing customer service and producing supporting promotional and outreach materials. RT spends much of its promotional dollars on point-of-sale materials, product tastings and packaging and will generally retain 10% of sales with the remainder going directly to the farmers.

RT has found that farmers that primarily rely on wholesale accounts are most suited for RT's systems and markets since they have a wholesale mentality, allowing them to understand the characteristics of wholesale markets. According to Rozyne, CSA farms and other farmers focusing on direct marketing are often unwilling or unable to produce the required consistency, volume and quality for wholesale markets as a result of different production standards and overall infrastructure (personal communication, 2007). The Food Hub can learn from this strategy by working to match different growers with the markets that suit them best, as it is difficult for smaller direct marketers to reach into larger wholesale markets. However, with tools like Om-Direct (to be discussed below) and the work of CAFF as an example, it may indeed be possible to find direct marketers who are able to satisfy institutional needs.

One way to help farmers meet these needs is by providing technical assistance to farmers, assistance akin to what the Intervale Center already provides through Success on Farms. Indeed, in order to ensure the required consistent quality and supply for wholesalers, RT offers economic development support for participating farmers, a critical component of RT's services. Interestingly, they also recognize that the seasonal availability of produce compromises consistent supply and are experimenting with extending the calendar for

existing product lines and slowly diversifying to add new product lines. The expectation is that longer seasonal availability and diversified supply will fill in the gaps and generate more overall sales. As farmers in Vermont continue to express their desire for shared root crop storage, year round greenhouses and similar facilities, and Chittenden County restaurants demarcate seasonality as their biggest “buy local” challenge, it becomes important for the Food Hub team to channel the satisfaction of these needs into the development of the Food Enterprise Center.

RT holds the belief that “local allegiance in a global marketplace is illogical (when profitability is the main standard)” (personal communication, 2007). Accordingly, RT seeks out relationships with farmers outside city and state political boundaries to extend seasonal and product availability. These relationships include fair trade banana growers. As the Food Hub project expands, it may become important to consider partnering with fair trade farmers around the world to bring desired quality products to its customers. Some drop box schemes offer fair trade products – such as bananas and coffee – as an add-on option, and consumers find these add-on options convenient, as they more adequately satisfy the consumer’s needs. Just as Red Tomato moved from a localized vision to a more regional focus, one that carefully considers the global marketplace, the Food Hub should also seriously consider the feasibility of an all-local venture and determine strategic, non-local partners, whether they be organic grain growers in New York or fair trade coffee growers in Belize.

Red Tomato has opted to maintain a nonprofit structure with an entrepreneurial spirit. RT considered restructuring as a farmer cooperative; however, RT found that structure to be slow, conservative and risk-averse. Additionally, RT has found that as a nonprofit they were able to ensure that farmers had a sense of ownership in how their products were marketed, but through informal meetings and conversations rather than through formal and more bureaucratic means. Ongoing grant support enables RT to continue offering economic development support to farmers and to maintain an emphasis on limited-resource and small-scale, local farmers. RT strives to plan cautiously and to maintain business transparency, operating with the mantra “under promise, over deliver.” Indeed, Rozyne has found that these business principles have enabled RT to establish strong relationships with farmers that are based on trust. The participating farmers have commented that they trust RT to manage the planning, logistics, marketing and sales of their products.

Eastern Carolina Organics (ECO) is another model for a marketing and distribution service for local organic produce, though unlike RT, ECO owns its own truck and operates within a farmer-ownership model (<http://www.easterncarolinaorganics.com/>). Eastern Carolina Organics is a 40% farmer-owned company (LLC) whose mission is to help small, organic, rural farmers access urban markets, maintain farmland and enable consumers – including chefs, grocers and families – to support local, sustainable agriculture by purchasing locally produced, organic products (personal communication, 2007). The LLC is co-owned by two other business partners who focus on brokering services for the farmers and who first launched the business without the farmer-ownership component. Once proven successful, farmers became willing to invest, and

today, ECO farmers retain 80% of sales while the other partners retain approximately 20%.

On their website, ECO explains that they are a company created to meet the consumers' goals of fresh, local organic produce while preserving family farms. An organic- and quality-focused company, ECO was first funded as a project of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CESA) with support from the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. The program's original aim was to help new organic farmers improve their mixed produce supplies and link these supplies with regional markets. The Association worked to accomplish this goal by developing a marketing and distribution service while offering customers unique "farm-to-table" educational and promotional presence.

ECO owns and runs a bio-diesel commercial, refrigerated truck. They have built their reputation on being as "farm fresh" as possible, picking up on farm and delivery produce to buyers on the same day. Indeed, what began with a few strawberries in April 2004 has become a year-round supplier of fresh produce that has worked with 45 farms throughout North Carolina, proving once again that starting small can enable smart, successful growth. ECO works with both small and large farms, pooling their harvests to meet the needs of the communities they serve (personal communication, 2007).

ECO's slow steady growth, strategic investments and farmer buy make them a successful model for collaborative marketing. ECO began with a minimal investment – a grant of \$40,000 to cover one full-time person's salary – and has grown into a viable, partially farmer-owned business in three years. They have grown slowly, using a modular strategy, and they did not develop their ownership model until after their pilot year, when farmers and others could fully evaluate the business's potential for success. Additionally, the ECO website is informative and easy to navigate. It includes a seasonal availability chart as well as a map of North Carolina pinpointing the locations of all ECO farms. As a broker, ECO manages the marketing and distribution of product for farmers who trust the services they provide, allowing the participating farms to focus more energy on producing high quality products. Finally, ECO provides a successful model for shorter chain food distribution and brokering that is working on a smaller scale than the Growers Collaborative.

Web-based Interfacing: Om-Organics' Project to Connect Buyers & Sellers

Growers Collaborative is one business that has successfully utilized an online purchasing system to help institutional buyers purchase local foods (<http://www.growerscollaborative.org/>). Growers Collaborative, however, moves these purchases on trucks it owns, acting as not just a broker but a distributor as well. Om-Direct, meanwhile, is an on-line marketing tool designed to be customizable for use in communities around the county in order to improve face-to-face direct marketing, supporting both farmers and buyers by facilitating electronic transactions and building product volumes (<http://www.om-direct.com/>). Still in development, Om-Direct is designed to allow farms to promote themselves on the network and buyers to assess local

product availability and pricing at a glance. Delivery schedules are also brokered online, directly between farm and buyer.

A project of Om-Organics, a venture of the non-profit, San Francisco Foundation Community Initiative Fund, Om-Direct grows out of Om-Organic's educational and direct marketing programs. Since 2002, Om-Organics has been working with the Farm-to-Restaurant cooperative network in the Bay Area to increase direct sales between farmers and restaurant chefs (<http://www.omorganics.org/page.php?pagename=Home>). A sourcing directory for wholesale buyers accessible by restaurants, retail stores and schools grew out of this partnership and attracted investors to fund the development of a new, customizable tool for local food distribution, Om-Direct.

As a software application, Om-Direct allows regional groups to communicate, track and supply their own regions, providing a convenient mechanism for building direct relationships. Larger institutional buyers can track farmers, availability and orders easily on-line, while non-profits, restaurant groups or farmer coops can act as administrators, facilitating the connections between local growers and consumers. Featuring a central repository for storing data about local producers and unique portals for administrators, Om-Direct will be completely customizable to each region's or project's needs.

A first version was launched in fall 2007, and it will be interesting to track the ongoing development of this software and to see how it can be incorporated into the Food Hub project as a way to facilitate on-line ordering among project participants. Beta testing is currently taking place at sites in the San Francisco Bay and New York City regions (personal communication). Beta testers include large alternative grocery chains and regional farmers' market associations.

The Food Hub could potentially utilize this software in a number of ways. As a Hub, it can use it to manage its participating farms; as a software administrator, it can provide direct connections between farms and large buyers. At its worst, Om-Direct may be adding another complicating layer to the already difficult task of connecting small, regional growers with institutional buyers. Phone calls and faxes, like those utilized Farm Fresh Connections, may prove more compatible with the systems already utilized by direct marketers and their customers. At its best, Om-Direct – or similar software - can allow farmers to advertise supply in a more effective and efficient way, allow for product aggregation and scalability, more adequately match menus with supplies and provide a user-friendly on-line arena that helps facilitate direct marketing while securing higher than wholesale prices.

From Wagbo to Aarstiderne: Drop Box Schemes Around the Globe

Multi-farm drop box schemes are cropping up around the country as a means through which small and medium scale producers can reach more consumers directly, securing the higher prices and loyal customers that make traditional Community Supported Agriculture a success while eliminating each farmer's need to grow a diversity of crops each season and handle all marketing themselves. According to an article published by

the Organic Consumers Association in August of 2000, Community Supported Agriculture provides a model for establishing a regional “connection channel” through which local and regional foodstuffs can travel directly to consumers at fair prices and with minimal packaging. The CSA-inspired multi-farm drop box scheme in this way is a successful model for satisfying recurring orders of fresh foods to consumers by utilizing a “web of complementary farms where consumers connect with the land” (<http://www.organicconsumers.org/Organic/csafoward.cfm>). But there are dangers as well; when too large, CSA-style programs may lose the connections – between farmer, land and customer – that make them so successful and instead begin mimicking the industrial and commercial systems that sustainable agriculture subverts.

Indeed, the Food Hub project must address this issue, as it places value on expediency and increases economies of scale to serve a larger consumer base with the quality and convenience associated with Community Supported Agriculture but without what some perceive as the all-important on-farm, face-to-face relationships. One example of a multi-farm CSA that keeps things small and beautiful is the Wagbo Peace Center in rural East Jordan, Michigan (<http://www.localharvest.org/farms/M200>). Wagbo Peace Center, a nonprofit farm and educational organization, launched a multi-farm CSA with the help of a SARE grant. The resulting CSA, Providence CSA, is small, with neighboring farms working together to deliver a variety of goods to seasonal shareholders. Wagbo acts as a “host farm,” maintaining refrigeration and storage capacity, serving as the pick up site and hosting seasonal festivals, such as a pumpkin festival in the fall (personal communication, 2007). Participating farms meet in the early spring to determine prices, mix and number of weeks for the CSA, and each farm donates the value of the vegetables and fruit provided in one share to Wagbo to cover costs.

Other multi-farm CSAs that are managed by a central farm or through a cooperative system are Alliance CSA in Nova Scotia, Canada, Lancaster Farm Fresh in Lancaster, PA (who have a great website at <http://www.scarecrowhill.com>), Sunflower Fields CSA in northeast Iowa and Common Wealth CSA in Massachusetts. These CSA programs are each designed to meet the needs of their individual communities while providing fair prices for farmers. They also all feature a host farm, which provides consumers with a place-based agricultural experience.

Other Community Supported Agriculture programs have evolved into multi-farm drop box and bulk ordering schemes that do not emphasize place-based experience for consumers but instead provide the convenience of closer to home delivery. Whole Farm Coop in Minnesota is a thirty farmer owned coop that delivers food all over the St. Paul area, particularly through churches and ethnic groups who do bulk ordering (<http://www.wholefarmcoop.com/>). They have a special relationship with the area’s Hmong residents, who buy live animals from the coop in order to ritually slaughter their own meat. Though not a Community Supported Agriculture program, Whole Farm’s bulk ordering system provides another model for linking farmers and consumers directly. Consumers receive order forms, either through paper or electronic bulletins, fill them out and return them to the coop along with payment. The coop then packages orders and delivers them to drop off sites.

In Montpelier, Vermont, a bulk ordering collective relies on a volunteer manager to consolidate farmer price and product lists, take orders, pay farmers and oversee the delivery of items to a church, where customers pick up locally produced items, such as meat, potatoes and soup, throughout the winter (personal communication, 2007). A lot of work for a volunteer manager, the collective has looked into hiring a manager as the program has grown. Indeed, brokering and managing CSA and bulk order programs takes a certain amount of oversight, the cost of which can be built into pricing or which can utilize existing or volunteer labor.

Denmark's Aarstiderne, a multi-farm home delivery drop box scheme that serves 35,000 households around the country, is an example of how a small idea can turn into something quite revolutionary, as Aarstiderne has changed the way an entire nation eats. Its founder, Thomas Harttung, expresses his company's growth this way: "We simply let it get out of hand" (<http://www.aarstiderne.com/>; <http://nofany.org/hottopics/harttung.htm>).

Aarstiderne started in 1996 with a \$10,000 grant from the Danish government. Harttung, a small, organic family farmer, launched a 100 household Community Supported Agriculture program with the dream of expanding to serve 250 families and proving that there is a market in Denmark for organic, local food. Eleven years later, the program serves 35,000 households in 85% of the country and employs 110 people while providing a large marketing channel for the nation's organic growers. The idea is simple: people log on to Aarstiderne's website and choose between eight different food boxes, from a simple vegetable box to a large, family sized box that includes veggies, fruits, meat, fish, crackers, juice and other groceries. Virtually every foodstuff imaginable is offered, from carrots to wine. Customers prepay for boxes one month at a time. At the beginning, customers paid for three months up front, which helped finance the company's development and enabled customers to share risks with both the company and its growers. This mutual risk made many customers feel that they owned a stake in the burgeoning business, a stake in the idea, which led to not just brand loyalty but great word-of-mouth marketing.

Drop offs are available every week, though most customers prefer the every other week option. Drivers leave baskets at apartment doors or on porches within a window of time, and there have been very few reported incidences of stolen or damaged goods. Simple, modern recipes are included to help people make sense of the food delivered, and customer service representatives, trained in the art of conversation, are available seven days a week for customers looking to express their opinions, make requests or just talk.

Harttung credits these conversationalists for his business's success, as they provide a direct connection to the product sold, a human voice so often missing in the industrial food system. Similarly, a number of farms around Denmark act as host farms, inviting customers for tours and events. Aarstiderne also sustainably manages a large forest, whose trees Harttung describes as the company's best ambassadors (<http://nofany.org/hottopics/harttung.htm>). At the same time, busy Danes who just want

to click it and forget it can place their orders on line from home, and their vegetable boxes will appear at their doorsteps, fresh and on time, week after week.

As a large, successful drop box scheme, Aarstiderne continues to work for better personal and environmental health by championing fresh, local food and by making consideration, quality, creativity, development, growth, transparency and organic farming household words (<http://www.aarstiderne.com/>). Investment in infrastructure has been critical to the company's growth. Owning its own trucks and employing its own packers, haulers and delivery personnel has allowed the company to shape its public image and ensured the best customer service possible. Second, Aarstiderne has learned that people like being able to call and talk to someone on the phone. The Food Hub must work to ensure that drop box participants maintain a direct connection to their site coordinator, if not to the farmers who supply product. Third, no advertising is better than word of mouth. If customers of the Food Hub like the service and quality of goods they receive, they will recruit coworkers and friends to participate. However, if they are not impressed, not only will they cancel their subscriptions, they will discourage others from participating. In this way, it is important to provide an accessible, warm and positive vision for the Food Hub with which consumers can ally.

Grow Alabama (GA) is a nonprofit organization inspired by Aarstiderne's success that is also fostering a wide-reaching vision for a more sustainable, local agricultural system, in which Alabamans "can invest with each bite" (<http://www.growalabama.com/>). In this way, Grow Alabama is driven to increase the availability of organic products in the state while keeping farmers on the land in Alabama. Jerry Spencer, Grow Alabama's founder and chief farmer, is a CSA farmer who believes in maintaining the connection between consumer and farmer. Much like the unique identification numbers found on Equal Exchange's fair trade products, each farm participating in the GA program has a unique number that is attached to its products, and customers can learn more about the farms online. Similarly, consumers can order drop boxes over the internet. Like Aarstiderne, the on farm connection is just as important as the ease of online ordering. GA hosts summer events at Spencer's farm where consumers can pick flowers and meet farmers.

Because of the lack of varieties and volumes of local, organically produced food, Grow Alabama currently supplements Alabama-grown products with products from neighboring states. In this way, GA's major obstacle is not demand, but supply, and Spencer is committed to incubating organic farmers through Grow Alabama's developing technical assistance and incubation programs. Touted as the country's first state-wide Community Supported Agriculture program, GA can teach the Food Hub to think regionally when sourcing product, even if it means supplementing baskets with closest sources in order to deliver to customers the quality and diversity of product they expect. One should also note the ease of on-line ordering, both for Aarstiderne and Grow Alabama, which does not replace but rather facilitates the direct connections that make Community Supported Agriculture successful.

Conclusion

The organizations, businesses and cooperatives described in this report are just a handful of the dozens of groups around the world who are working on localized distribution and marketing systems that allow small farms to prosper in regional food systems. Not one of them has yet to tackle multiple markets. While Growers Collaborative is working on a drop box scheme, it began as an institutional supplier and has become a successful enterprise before embarking on this new endeavor. While Red Tomato envisioned multiple varieties of local food moving into local markets, it has found success in sticking to just a few products and figuring out how to sell them well. As we continue to develop the feasibility of different marketing channels, it will become increasingly important to hold these lessons close: take small steps, under promise and over deliver, make connections and let it get (at least a little) out of hand.