

Farmers Growing the Market with TFA-Approved

Deborah J. Kane (Research & Education Grant Program)

Project Number: SW00-024

Title: Farmers Growing the Market with TFA-Approved

Principal Investigator:

Deborah J. Kane
Former Executive Director
Food Alliance
1829 NE Alberta, Suite 5
Portland, OR 97209
503.493.1066
getcertified@foodalliance.org
www.foodalliance.org
(Kane is current National Director, USDA Farm to School Program)



Participants:

Lee Chapman, Superintendent
Crook Deschutes Education Service District, Oroville, WA

Andrea Clarke, Environmental Psychologist
NRCS, Fort Collins, CO

David Granatstein, Sustainable Ag Coordinator
Washington State University

Doc and Connie Hatfield
Oregon Country Beef

Robert Lamb, Lamb's Market
Wilsonville, OR

Diane MacEachern, President
Vanguard Communications, Washington DC

Cory Schreiber, Chef and Operating Partner
Wildwood Restaurant, Portland, OR

Tom Shotzko, Extension Economist
Washington State University

Western SARE Grant: \$100,000

Situation:

The Food Alliance (now known as Food Alliance) is a voluntary certification program based on standards that define sustainable agriculture practices. It began operating in 1997 as a project of Oregon State and Washington State universities and the Washington Department of Agriculture.

Food Alliance works at the juncture of science, business and values to define and promote sustainability in agriculture and the food industry, ensuring safe and fair working conditions, humane treatment of animals, and careful stewardship of ecosystems.



Food Alliance farms produce a vast array of agricultural products, including lamb, beef, grains and fresh fruits and vegetables. – Photos by Ron Daines

Food Alliance provides comprehensive sustainability standards and a third-party certification program that address a wide range of consumer and industry concerns.

This project sought to provide Food Alliance Certified farmers with training and resources for marketing so that they could take better advantage of the program's benefits and the seal's appeal to consumers.

The grant also aimed to increase consumer awareness and support for the seal of approval as well as sustainable agriculture in general.



Objectives:

- Food Alliance Certified farmers will develop customized marketing materials with FA staff, participate in professional media training, connect with consumers and retailers through farm tours and special events and create an online presence and network for the farm
- Food Alliance will set the stage for farmer marketing efforts through regional public awareness campaigns to cultivate consumers and retailers
- Food Alliance Certified farmers will share success stories and results of the project in FA grower meetings, agricultural conferences, online forums and their own marketing efforts
- FA staff will share project strategies and impacts online, in print and directly with members and collaborators locally and regionally

Results and Milestones:

Participating agricultural producers and retail partners provided input on marketing pieces – banners, flyers and other retail outreach pieces – resulting in messages conveyed being succinct and engaging and appealing to consumers in stores, farmers markets and farm stands.

Based on grower satisfaction and feedback in 2000, additional materials and staff resources were devoted to farmers markets in 2001. The FA core retail partner, Thriftway Group of retailers, dramatically increased the visibility of Food Alliance marketing materials in its stores in 2001.

As a result, the number of farmers and ranchers certified by Food Alliance increased to 84 from 49 during the grant period, and sales increased to around \$5 million, up from approximately \$2 million the year before.

Consumer awareness surveys, taken at participating retail partners and farmers markets, indicated that awareness of FA and sustainable agriculture increased two-fold from August 2000 to July 2001.

Results:

This project and Food Alliance program increased producer capacity to market their products, increased market opportunities and increased prices for sustainably grown products.

For many small family operations, the marketplace rewards increased their margin, allowing them to remain in business.

Increased producer participation in the FA program and increased consumer demand for sustainably grown food products encouraged increased adoption of sustainable agriculture practices.

Publications/Outreach:

During the grant period, Food Alliance staff presented its program and the work of the Western SARE grant through 33 speaking engagements and events nationwide.

FA shared marketing materials and worked with farmers to market Food Alliance products in 34 retail outlets in Oregon and southwest Washington and five farmers markets in the Portland area.

FA hosted a National Eco-label Conference in Portland in October 2000, attended by 230 people.

Attendance at other outreach events:

- Workshops (annual grower meetings): 60
- Field Days (melon day, farm fest) : 135
- Other events (commodity meetings, grower groups): 110

During the grant period, FA was featured in 42 local, regional and national publications, including the New York Times, The (Portland) Oregonian and Good Housekeeping and on National Public Radio.

Producer Reaction:

The annual grower survey at the end of the 2000 growing season yielded this sampling of remarks:

“FA membership helped motivate me to adopt a more sustainable form of farm management and to keep the principles of integrated fruit production in mind.” – Annala Orchards

“Food Alliance opened new markets and set my product apart as something different in the marketplace. – Locati Farms

“We had good use of Food Alliance banners and labels and got good consumer response.” – Prairie Creek Farm

Update:

Today, more than 330 Food Alliance Certified farms, ranches and handling operations produce beef, lamb, pork, poultry, dairy, eggs, shellfish, grains, legumes, fresh fruits and vegetables, and packaged products containing these ingredients. In 2012 Food Alliance expanded its certification program to include nursery and greenhouse operations.

Visit: www.foodalliance.org