



### Western SARE

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Find Western SARE online at:  
[www.westernsare.org](http://www.westernsare.org)

### Western SARE Grant Categories

- Research & Education
- Professional Development
- Farmer/Rancher
- Professional + Producer
- Graduate Student

Western SARE is supported by the National Institute for Food and Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Western Region SARE program is hosted at Utah State University, and the Western Region SARE PDP program is hosted by the University of Wyoming.



## BUILDING ONLINE MARKETS

### Situation

Many agricultural producers in south-central Idaho expressed a need to expand their markets. They already were engaged in farmers markets and community supported agriculture, but they wanted to enhance their profitability.

Idaho's Bounty Cooperative exists to provide a year-round market opportunity via the web for small-scale farmers and ranchers in south-central Idaho.

Producers agreed that they could benefit from online marketing, but they acknowledged a need for help in website marketing, including web design, the printing of labels, packaging and pricing.

### Objectives

- Conduct four workshops in four different geo-



## STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURE'S INFRASTRUCTURE

ADDING VALUE, BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS, INCREASING PROFITS

graphical areas in south-central Idaho

- Visit farmers and ranchers to provide individual assistance
- Engage three producers (Ballard, Burns and McMahan) to provide peer-to-peer training, speaking about their experiences and the advantages of online and direct market sales
- Open training sessions to all farmers and ranchers interested in applying more sustainable production methods



Mike Heath, right, working on his M&M Farms. — Photo by Janine McCann

### Actions

The training and education efforts used these methods to achieve the project's objectives:

- Peer-to-peer councils
- One-to-one training
- Phone consultation
- Printed materials
- Web and email communications
- Educational workshops

Idaho's Bounty Cooperative held three educational workshops attended by more than 50 producers. Half of those attended all three workshops.

Individual assistance for specific online technical problems was provided case by case, primarily by phone. Technical assistance for specific problems was also avail-



Preserves from Fair Mountain Farms near Fairfield.

— Photo by Paulette Phlipot

### Professional + Producer Grant

**Title:** IBC Technical Services to Farmers/Ranchers for Online Markets in South Central Idaho

**Project Number:** FW08-318

### Principal Investigator:

Judy Hall (formerly with Idaho's Bounty Co-op)

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 General Manager (current)

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### Producer Advisors:

Steve and Stacie Ballard  
 Ballard Family Dairy and Cheese

Judd McMahan  
 Wood River Organics

Janie Burns  
 Meadowlark Farm

**Amount Funded:** \$29,997

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*The goal of Western SARE is to foster sustainability through grants that enable cutting-edge research and education to open windows of sustainability across the West.*

*SARE's vision is an enduring American agriculture of the highest quality. This agriculture is profitable, protects the nation's land and water and is a force for a rewarding way of life for farmers and ranchers whose quality products and operations sustain their communities and society.*

*SARE's mission is to advance — to the whole of American agriculture — innovations that improve profitability, stewardship and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking research and education.*

[www.westernsare.org](http://www.westernsare.org)

## BUILDING ONLINE MARKETS

able to individuals at each of the three workshops.

Three producer partners spoke at one or more of the meetings about their experience with Idaho's Bounty Cooperative, offering advice and suggestions.

Also presenting at one or more of the workshops were:

- The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred program ([www.idahopreferred.com/](http://www.idahopreferred.com/)), discussing farm-to-school opportunities for producers to meet new customers and expand markets, and Ag in the Classroom ([www.agclassroom.org](http://www.agclassroom.org)).
- Red Feather Bitter Creek Restaurant, discussing how to work with a restaurant, buying preferences and growing a wholesale business.

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture gave each participant its handbook, "Starting Specialty Food Business," and Idaho's Bounty Co-op passed out a list of the foods that customers are looking for, including products for which they need a greater supply.



The greenhouse at Prairie Sun Farm operated by Carol and Jeff Rast.

— Photo by Paulette Phlipot



A taste of Idaho's Bounty. — Photo by Stelma Photography

### Results

The workshops attracted producers who had not previously marketed products online. The peer presenters, being producers themselves, were able to establish a rapport with attendees that may have had more value than presentations from agricultural professionals. Examples of value are captured in comments from attendees:

- "Because of our experience with Idaho's Bounty, our son and daughter-in-law took an educated risk and raised over 300 turkeys. Now sell them year round, smoked, not just at Thanksgiving."
- "I was able to try out my new product and get feedback that people valued my product. That helped me gain confidence."
- "If you are a small grower and not big enough to play in the big field, then IBC helps you to have a large enough market to sell when your product is ripe and ready."
- "We can now see (online) that there is a need for more product in the winter so we are researching winter crops for next year."
- "It's nice to have new market opportunities opening so we can tell young people to come and work on the farm."

Based on feedback at the workshops, IBC developed a handout to go in customers' bags that explains IBC pricing.

Among marketing hints evolving from the workshops:

- Try to put things on sale; anything on sale looks tempting
- Give a gift discount during holidays
- Add a free item to a customer's bag – a "taster"
- To develop a pricing strategy, go online to see what other producers are charging

### Potential Benefits

These trainings taught producers how to market themselves online by posting their personal stories. This develops customer relationships and loyalty almost as successfully as at farmers markets, but with more leverage.

Customers can go online any time to read farmer and rancher stories, which helps overcome the anonymity of food – they can go online and see the face of their food.

### Update

Idaho's Bounty has experienced rapid growth since receiving this 2008 Western SARE grant, and now has a full-time general manager. The co-op has grown to more than 50 farm businesses, and sales to nearly 1,800 members have tripled since 2008 to \$626,000 in 2011. Sales are projected at more than \$800,000 in 2011 and \$1.2 million in 2013.