The Missouri Regional Cuisines Project (MRCP) was launched in 2002 based on three years of research by Dr. Elizabeth (“Beth”) Barham, Dept. of Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri. Dr. Barham studied labels of origin for wine and food products in France, Spain, Portugal and Quebec to observe how the systems behind the labels function and to identify key elements needed to create a viable system in Missouri. The goal of the MRCP is to promote Missouri wine and food products using distinct labels of origin based on ecological regions of the state. Regional labels have been used for centuries in Europe to identify food and wine products based on where they are produced. In Missouri, a diverse range of soil types and landscapes creates a wide array of possibilities for agricultural products associated with particular regions. By developing a model region in Missouri that resembles European wine and food regions, or “appellations,” the MRCP is demonstrating the economic development potential of this form of organizing for rural regions across the United States.

The Department of Rural Sociology collaborates with several other entities at MU and state government agencies to support the MRCP. Initial funding for the program came from a USDA-AMS Federal-State Market Improvement Program grant. Since then, the project has received support through the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA) as well as more recently through the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at MU.

The MRCP works closely with MDA’s Grape & Wine Program because wine is the lead product for defining the regions used by the project. The tie of wine to the land that it comes from, or its “terroir,” is widely recognized. Besides being an important draw for tourism, wine is a regional “image setter.” It can match with other local offerings to create a sense of a regional cuisine with a distinctive local flavor. With this in mind, the MRCP aims at increasing opportunities to market existing and new local food items such as sausages, cheeses, fruits and vegetables both fresh and transformed (jams, etc.), in the pilot region. These products will be marketed in wine tasting rooms, in on-farm venues such as farm stands, at local farmers markets, and in restaurants in the region and in nearby cities.

Lacking a long historical presence of regionally identified wine and food products, the Missouri project approached delineating regions using modern ecological science and local cultural reservoirs of farming and food knowledge. Tim Nigh of the Missouri Ecological Classification Project in the Department of Conservation, and Walter Schroeder, recently retired from the Geography Dept. of the University of Missouri–Columbia, collaborated to define the boundaries for three regions in Missouri that included a critical mass of wineries. They formed the beginning map for the MRCP, and it was from these three that the pilot region along the Mississippi was chosen to launch the project.

A label of origin system for regional products of the kind known in Europe is a complex mixture of ecological, social, cultural and legal/political components. Once the map of the pilot region was established, the project began by organizing local producers as well as regional government and economic development professionals into a “regional roundtable.” A database has been developed that includes over four hundred persons throughout the six-county area who are involved in one way or another in the project. Three region-wide meetings have been held in different parts of the pilot region. At the regional meetings, presentations and discussion sessions have helped define interests and concerns of local producers that will help guide the project’s future.

One initiative underway is the creation of an agritourism map for the region that will identify unique food offerings and locations where local food and wine can be purchased. The map will include other outdoor activities continued on next page
such as hiking, biking, bird watching and state parks for picnicking and camping. Another initiative has been the completion of an historical and current foodways study by a folklore specialist. The summary report of her study of the pilot region is available on the MRCP website. The study identified particular products grown in the region in the past that are no longer in production. Several were singled out by participants in the region-wide meetings as products they would like to see return to production. Work is underway to evaluate market potential for these particular products.

As the project moves forward, additional assistance will be needed from the state to help establish a regional labeling scheme which will guarantee to consumers that the products they buy are authentically identified with their home region. As producers in Europe have seen, greater recognition for a region’s products causes them to gain market value. At this point, it will be important for the state to protect the regional label from fraud in the marketplace. If this occurs with a regional label in Europe, the state (such as France) pursues legal redress, not the producers themselves. This is an important feature of regional labeling as it can save the producers the legal costs of enforcing their rights to the regional label. The Missouri Regional Cuisines Project anticipates and is planning for a high level of notoriety for Missouri’s products outside of its borders, including an international reputation for quality. Therefore work on protecting the regional label is expected to continue alongside the development of regional offerings so that local producers are always able to gain the benefit of participating in the project.

The Missouri Regional Cuisines Project website can be found at: [http://extension.missouri.edu/cuisines/](http://extension.missouri.edu/cuisines/).

For information on joining the pilot region project now underway, contact Carol Fulkerson, project administrative assistant, at fulkersoncj@missouri.edu, or 573-884-5170.

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**Small Farm Profitability**

**What makes a small farm profitable?**

There may be as many answers as there are small farms! However, research conducted by the North Central Initiative for Small Farm Profitability provides over 40 case studies and a number of research reports about small farm strategies to create and maintain profitability. You can check out research information and case studies at the website, [www.farmprofitability.org](http://www.farmprofitability.org).

Through our CFSSA program office, you can get a CD that contains much of the same information broken into seven different topics, including marketing strategies, new generation cooperatives, equipment sharing, alternative production practices, farm diversification, farm succession strategies and internet marketing. Each topic area contains ready-made PowerPoint presentations that will help disseminate ideas about small farm profitability.

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**Agricultural Educational Opportunities for Latinos**

Two workshops for Latino farmers and three for agriculture/food related employers of Latino workers were organized and conducted by José García, coordinator of the Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program. García partnered with various Extension specialists to provide these opportunities to Latino farmers. The farmers were introduced to topics from production risks, to marketing risks, financial and legal risks, and to the use of computers to manage risks. One seminar was about risk management issues in general and another one focused on risk management in dairy production for Latino farmers. Workshops were conducted in both languages, English and Spanish as needed; and participants appreciated the information and learning. Participant comments included: “Everything was very good and thank you for helping us”, “great presentations”, and “Excellent, I hope these materials are widely dispersed”.

In addition, farmers employing Latino workers attended workshops on human risks associated to their labor force. Participants became more culturally aware, learned about rules and regulations on workers safety at the workplace, labor and rights issues, and immigration aspects of hiring and retaining Latino workers. These workshops drew much attention and attendees included more than just farmers/employers. Representatives of worker serving organizations, churches, agencies, and NGOs attended and contributed to the discussions. José García brought together partners and specialists of various units and organizations such as the MU Extension AgrAbility Program, MU Agricultural Electronic Bulletin Board, regional Ex-
The Market for Local Food: Fad or Real Trend?

By Mary Hendrickson, Ph.D., Community Food Systems and Sustainable Agriculture Program

Buying locally produced food is no fad. In the ten years between 1994 and 2004, the number of farmers’ markets across the United States rose from 1,755 to 3,137 – a 78 percent increase! Certified organic farms nearly tripled because of growth in demand. In 2003, two out of three consumers used organic products at least occasionally, with organic and natural food sales at six percent of total food store sales.

Chefs are seeking out locally produced foods for their flavor and quality. Three out of five chefs surveyed by the University of Nebraska were interested in receiving direct shipments from the farm. In St. Louis, MU researchers Beth Barham and Lewis Jett found that 83 percent of high-end chefs were already purchasing locally produced products, but almost all of them wanted to purchase more. Moreover, 200 college food services across the country are now buying at least one food product from their local community.

Why are these deep-seated trends appearing now? Americans are looking for good tasting, high-quality food. In short, we’re developing our taste buds! Flavorful food that is fresh is a winner for anyone’s table. Just as important is consumers’ interest in supporting their local economies. Nearly 70 percent of consumer households surveyed in Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Wisconsin rated supporting their local farmers as extremely or very important. Almost 60 percent of Americans polled nationwide thought that family farms should be supported even if it meant higher food prices.

What do all these statistics mean for Missouri farmers? First, we have a great market! We don’t have enough farmers for all the farmers’ markets that operate in places like Kansas City and St. Louis, and even more markets are under consideration in small and large communities across the state.

Second, infrastructure remains a critical need. We have mainline produce distributors in Kansas City and St. Louis who are desperately seeking out locally produced foods in response to demand from chefs and other customers. Some farmers are seeking to create their own farmer-controlled distribution networks by partnering with chefs and processors. Third, our farmers need to get more products – especially those that benefit the most from being grown and processed locally (think succulent strawberries, ripe tomatoes and natural meat) – moving in the channel to grocery stores, restaurants and schools.

Are you interested? I hope so – as do all the other Missouri consumers hungry for great food!

Approaching Foodservice Establishments With Locally Grown Products. University of Nebraska Food Processing Center (accessed at: http://www.farmprofitability.org/research/grownlocal2/grownlocal2.htm)

Attracting Consumers with Locally Grown Products. University of Nebraska Food Processing Center (accessed at http://www.farmprofitability.org/local.htm)

What's New In Sustainable Food and Farming Series:

Each month during the 2004-2005 school year the Community Food Systems & Sustainable Agriculture Program will feature speakers on important topics at our “Lunch and Learn” series. These informal seminars are held on the UMC campus from 11:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and refreshments are provided.

April 11, 2005—Memorial Union Room S203, 12:00 -1:30 pm
Dr. Mehmet Arda, Head Commodities Branch, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development will present on: Supermarkets, Farmers and Development: Opportunity or Challenge? Dr. Arda’s visit is being funded by the Division of Applied Social Science Seminar Series and the CFSSA Program.

Copies of most past presentations may be viewed at http://agebb.missouri.edu/sustain

FAREWELL TO JOAN BENJAMIN
Our Joan Benjamin, MDA Sustainable Agriculture Demo Awards Program coordinator is leaving Missouri. As many of you know, she has accepted a position as “Farmer and Rancher Grant Program Coordinator” with NCR-SARE based in Lincoln, NE. We will all sorely miss Joan, and her presence at the Department of Agriculture, but we wish her all the best in her new position. We look forward to working with Joan in her new capacity, as Missouri will be part of her new regional responsibilities.

Mark Your Calendar

Missouri Dietetic Assoc. Annual Mtg., April 13-15
Holiday Inn Executive Center Columbia, MO

Shiitake Mushroom Production From Tree to Table - April 16th
9:30 a.m.—3:30 pm
Ozark Forest Mushrooms near Salem, MO

2nd National Farm to Cafeteria Conference, June 16-18
Kenyan Ohio
www.foodsecurity.org

Missouri State Fair, August 11-21, Sedalia, MO
www.mostatefair.com

Community Food Security Coalition Annual Conference, October 6-9
Atlanta, GA
www.foodsecurity.org

Featured Websites

www.farmprofitability.org
www.foodcircles.missouri.edu
www.foodsecurity.org
http://sustainabletable.org/home
http://www.eatwellguide.org
Http://www.hti.umich.edu/n/nal/

Check It Out