



MVC & SEMAP



Island Produce

Business-to-Business Networking Event - May 4, 2005

Meeting Summary

Attendance

- 55 people, representing, 42 businesses and organizations
- 17 growers, 20 potential buyers, 2 other organizations

1. Background

- This event was part of a continuing effort by the MVC and SEMAP to promote local produce (farm produce, fin fish and shellfish). It comes out of the work of a committee that has been meeting since January of this year.
- There was an effort a few years ago that created a logo that was used for a while, but this effort was not sustained.
- Several years ago, the MVC and the Agricultural Society produced a consumer's guide/map to Island farms and recently discussed the possibility of a new joint effort.
- The Ag Society recently updated its survey of Island farms (produce and horticulture.)

2. Matching Producers and Buyers

- There is a definite demand for Island-grown produce, although there is a limited supply. Supply and demand for various items should be examined more closely.
- Producers (farmers, fishermen) and buyers (restaurants, caterers, grocery stores) are not sure who grows particular items and who is need of particular products.
- A priority is to create a mechanism to match producers and buyers. The conclusion at the meeting was that the most effective mechanism was to use the Internet. On a daily or weekly basis, producers could post what produce they have available and buyers could, at their convenience, order what they needed, ideally on-line and tied directly into a distribution method. SEMAP offered to try to find or develop appropriate software.
- We could also publish a directory of buyers and growers, with business profiles and other information about product inventory and product needs.

3. Maintaining a Consistent Supply of Products

- A concern of buyers is planning menus based on the availability of certain products, and then not having them available. Should they substitute off-Island produce?
- Maintaining a level of consistency to supply certain products week after week is challenging for farmers, since it is largely dependent on the weather.
- Arrangement in advance is tricky because the farmers are not always sure when they will be picking products. Farmers may know two days in advance that a product is ready to be picked.

- Farmers can grow different products each year
- There are instances where there is an overabundant supply of products which can lead to loss of revenue for the farmer if the product cannot be moved in time or there is not enough demand.

4. Distribution

- There are small windows of time when products are picked and ready to go to market before certain products go bad.
- Many farms do not offer delivery service because it is not cost effective.
- During the busy season, caterers simply do not have the time to pick up particular products from various sources.
- Caterers needs can change more frequently than a restaurant, which has a consistent menu with daily specials.
- Some individuals pick up local products directly from farms and the farmers' market to make deliveries to the back doors of restaurants and other buyers.
- Island Food Product, is a local food distributor, has in the past taken extra supplies of product and delivered items to buyers direct. They expressed interest in taking on delivery of local products on a trial basis, although some people were concerned that paying for commercial delivery would add too much to the price of already costly products.
- The possibility of using the West Tisbury farmers' market as a distribution point was raised but caterers said they are so busy to do any pick-up, there were issues with refrigeration, and farmers there are focused primarily on setting up and serving the public.
- It would be highly desirable to set up a daily delivery system that would involve picking up from producers and delivering to buyer, ideally tied into the Internet ordering.

5. Product Identification and Marketing

- We should develop an "Island Grown" logo to identify locally grown produce in grocery stores and restaurants. We would have to put in place a certification program controlling use.
- Producers and buyers could do much more to promote local produce with events, displays, p.r. activities, using the media, etc.

6. Next Steps (based on meeting and subsequent discussion)

- 1) Create a draft Directory of Vineyard Farms and Fishermen (summer 2005).
- 2) Work with SEMAP on developing the website of producers, ideally incorporating on-line ordering. (May 2006).
- 3) Create a database of producers and suppliers for use on the website or as a directory. (start this summer to ready by May 2006).
- 4) Put in place a delivery system, ideally tied into the website ordering. (May 2006).
- 5) Create an "Island Grown" logo and put into place a mechanism to promote and oversee its use (May 2006).
- 6) Organize a marketing campaign (start as soon as possible and expand next year).