



# Organic Marketing 101

*A Guide for Getting Your Products to Market*



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Copy Editors: Lizi Barba &  
Kathleen Litman

## Content Advisors

Dina Izzo, Founder, BluDog  
Organic Produce Services; Mark  
Mulcahy, Co-host of "An Organic  
Conversation," Produce and  
Management Consultant, CDS  
Consulting

## Reviewers

Morton Bernstein, Jeff Biddle,  
Grant Brians, Robert BD Dautch,  
Ben Feldman, David Gagnon,  
Dina Izzo, Kathleen Litman, Sam  
Mayhew, Eric Michielssen, Julie  
Morris, Mark Mulcahy, Thomas  
Nelson, Bu Nygrens, Ryan  
Peterson, Benzi Ronen, John  
Taylor, Deborah Yashar

## Designer

Sarah Watters, CCOF Marketing  
Production Assistant

## Production TeamworkX

Eric Fraser (Group Leader &  
Advertising Sales), Monique  
Freitas (Advertising Sales), Steve  
Ferguson (Advertising Sales)  
and Kurt West (Art Director),  
(707) 921-6152,  
advertising@ccof.org

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- 
- 4** *Before You Begin*
  - 6** *Farmers' Markets*
  - 8** *Community Supported Agriculture*
  - 10** *Restaurant*
  - 12** *Retail*
  - 14** *Wholesale*
  - 16** *Export*
  - 18** *Resource Guide*
  - 19** *Contributors*



# BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**Many different market channels exist for your organic product, but not all channels will align with your goals, values, product line, and personality.**

Choosing the perfect market for your product can be overwhelming, so choose what market channel suits you best before you make a major investment in your cropping plan or product recipe. If you are a person who likes high interaction with customers then direct markets, like farmers' markets or CSAs, may be right for you. If you have large volumes, or prefer working with only a handful of buyers, then you may want to consider wholesale and retail markets. Either way it is important to have the end consumer in mind, and how your product will reach them, in order to successfully turn your organic product into dollars.

This guide was assembled by CCOF in conjunction with many market experts to help you assess what market channel is right for your organic product. We provide advice from experts on how to get started in six different market channels: farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), restaurants, wholesale, retail, and export markets. To begin, review the key questions below to assess the core strengths and weaknesses of your operation and review key tips that are important regardless of what market channel you choose.

## Assess the Strengths of Your Operation

Start with a review of the main strengths and weaknesses of your business. Your skills and successes determine where you should focus your energy when seeking a new market. Ask yourself the following questions to help you assess the strengths of your operation:

- o What are your strengths and resources?
- o What are your weaknesses?
- o Who is in your company? What are their primary skills?
- o How many markets do you currently work with? Do you have the capacity to expand?
- o Who are your target customers? Where do they shop?

## Address Transportation Options and Storage Needs

Knowing your transportation needs before entering a new marketing channel will help reduce costs and ensure that your business is effective. First, look at what transportation options and routes you will need for potential markets. Investigate the distribution systems that already exist in your region. There might be opportunities to develop relationships with other growers and group deliveries to create an economy of scale. In addition, determine:

- o Will you need to buy a truck? Will it need to be refrigerated?
- o Will you need to pay a driver to do the deliveries?



- o What kind of storage will be required for your products?  
Will you need a cooler or ice?
- o Do you have dry storage that is clean and rodent-proof?

### Develop Relationships with Buyers

Positive working relationships are the key to any successful marketing transaction; they determine the ultimate success or failure of your sale. Long-term success depends on developing long-term trust.

- o Know your own values and align yourself with those who have similar values.
- o Learn the language of the businesses with which you work.
- o Be clear, organized, accessible, and sensitive to other people's time pressures.
- o Be reliable, creative, and adaptive.
- o Be kind. Remember to treat working relationships with patience and consideration.

### Know the Pack Standards for Your Market

Learn the pack standards and postharvest handling requirements for the market you want to enter. Do not save this step for after you have planted the crop as knowing these standards may help you determine which market channel is right for you. Learn the labeling requirements for your product as well. If you are selling to wholesale or retail markets then packages must be properly labeled with the farm name, location, unit amount, state of origin, and certifying body for organic.

### Keep Regular Records

- o Keep a record of your cost of production; this will help you determine the base price for your product to ensure financial success.
- o Keep harvest and sales records to help you determine the best volume and product mix for your market; this will also help you minimize your waste.
- o Always provide an invoice with delivery and keep a signed copy for your records.
- o Keep a record of all products delivered.
- o What is your/their payment policy? Cash on delivery? Monthly billing?
- o Be sure to collect or you will go in debt!

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effective selling at

# Farmers' Markets

*Building Community Connections with Farmers*

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The concept of a farmers' market originated in 1934 when a group of growers trucked their produce to an empty lot in Los Angeles to bring produce directly to consumers. Since then, farmers' markets have been an important part of the urban/farm linkage and continue to rise in popularity. As of mid-2011 there were 7,175 farmers' markets operating throughout the United States. This is a 17 percent increase from 2010.[1] In California alone there are over 700 certified farmers' markets, representing approximately 2,200 producers. Certified Farmers' Markets require growers to sell only their own produce.

Farmers' markets provide organic farmers with the opportunity to sell directly to the consumer, thus capturing a greater percentage of their shopping dollar. Robert BD Dautch, owner/farmer of CCOF certified Earthtrine Farms says: "If you want to feel that you are part of a community, that you sustain a community, and that a community sustains you, then farmers' markets are definitely the way to market your produce. I have been feeding some families for over 25 years and the connection we have cannot be put into words."

The following steps and tips can help you access this direct sales channel and understand the regulations associated with selling at farmers' markets. As the majority of CCOF certified growers are based in California, some of the information is specific to California Certified Farmers' Markets. Growers outside California should check with their state agriculture department for information on how farmers' markets are regulated in their state.

## Research and Find an Available Farmers' Market

Check with your local market management agencies to determine which market locations have available booth space, as some markets may not have vacancies or may already be at capacity for certain types of products. If there is not a market in your desired area, consider hosting a farm stand so people can come to you, or working with other farmers to start your own market.

## Become a Certified Producer

California Certified Farmers' Market sellers may only offer produce and other products that they have grown themselves on farms that the producer possesses or owns. Accessing these markets requires a State of California Certified Producer's Certificate issued by a County Agricultural Commissioner documenting that you are a producer who is actually growing what you are selling or preparing to sell. This certification requires an inspection of your growing areas as a means of verification for the products listed on your certificate. Producers are also subject to additional verification inspections at the markets. It is important to note that only items listed on the certificate can be sold at markets, and the certificate must be conspicuously displayed. Documentation of your organic status from both the state of California and your organic certification agency, such as CCOF, is also required.

**Tip:** Mention to market managers that you are certified organic, as market preference is often given to certified organic producers.

Contact your state department of agriculture or County Agricultural Commissioner to find out how to apply.

## Pick Your Product/Product Mix

Consider the product mix that is already at a market when choosing which farmers' market may be right for you. Depending on your situation, you may be able to adapt your product mix for the market or choose the market that fits your product. For example, if you grow oranges, don't pick a market that already has five orange growers; however, if you are starting out as a mixed vegetable grower you may want to choose to plant varieties that will make you unique. Certified Producer's Certificates allow growers to sell their fruits, vegetables, eggs, honey, and nursery plants at farmers' markets without meeting packing requirements, an exemption which can lower costs. Growers may also market processed products including juices, jams, wine, and nuts that are derived from produce listed on their certificates. These processed products must comply with any applicable health department requirements.

## Consider Sharing Market Booths to Save on Costs

Some markets allow certified producers to share a booth with another producer, which can be beneficial for first-time farmers by reducing booth costs. Each producer's certificate must be displayed and their produce must be identifiable. Growers must receive approval from the market manager to sell for other certified producers.

## Use "Certified Organic" Signage

Optimize your presence as an organic farmer by clearly communicating your organic status. Display your organic certification at your booth. Visit [www.ccof.org/store.php](http://www.ccof.org/store.php) for CCOF signs and organic labels.



Along with the Certified Producer's Certificate from the County Agricultural Commissioner, organic growers must display their Organic Registration for the State of California and their Organic Certificate from a USDA-accredited certifier. Inspectors visit markets to check and a lack of documentation results in fines. Along with the Certified

Producer's Certificate from the County Agricultural Commissioner, organic growers must display their Organic Registration for the State of California and their Organic Certificate from a USDA-accredited certifier. Displaying these certificates informs consumers about production methods and verifies that products represented as organic are certified.

Organic standards require organic and non-organic products to be clearly separated on the table. It is important that growers selling organic and non-organic produce at their stand clearly distinguish between certified organic and non-organic items. Product displays must be arranged so that organic products and non-organic products cannot touch unless they are packaged. Organic versions and non-organic versions of the same product (such as tomatoes) should not be side by side, as to prevent accidental commingling. Be sure to stay compliant!

## Booth Setup: Think Strategically

Once you are ready to sell, you will need to think about who and what goes into your booth besides product. Choose an enthusiastic and friendly person to work the market to ensure that you get the most return on your effort. You may best serve your operation by choosing another representative for your farm. A well-staffed booth can carry out all the tasks necessary to make your market presence a success.

Staff should also be trained on your farm story. Increase customer loyalty by educating market shoppers about your growing practices and the benefits of buying organic. Prepare for both easy and difficult questions! Knowing about your farm's practices and history will help staff sell your product. Offering samples of your product attracts customers and encourages interaction at your booth. Sampling is also a great way to get immediate feedback on new or unusual varieties and to gauge consumer interest for future planting strategies and product selection.

## Know Your Math!

Finally, remember that you are working in a fast-paced sales environment. In order to facilitate quick transactions and keep up with lines of customers, you will need to add product costs and make change quickly. Keep a calculator in your market kit or use prices that are easier to calculate for your customers, such as \$.50 each, or 2 for \$3.00. Ensure that all staff members are comfortable with your sales process.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5072472&acct=frmrdirmt>

*creating a*

# Community Supported Agriculture

*program*

*Connecting Consumers with Local Agriculture*

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Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) began in the 1960s in Europe and Japan to address concerns about food safety and the urbanization of agricultural land. Jan Vander Tuin then brought the model to the United States in the 1980s. In its original design, a community pledges support to a farm operation and in turn, a farm supplies produce to their supporters. Over time, CSAs have evolved to accommodate both the consumer and the farmer.

“CSAs are a great way to build connection with your community. We started with no experience and reached out to local neighbors, churches, service organizations, and schools ... quickly growing our CSA to 100 subscribers in the first year.” - Julie Morris, CSA Coordinator/Founder, Join the Farm

CSAs benefit organic agriculture in that:

- o Farmers earn income through confirmed subscriptions that provide “seed” money for the upcoming season
- o Members gain a shared connection with the land and improve their diets through regular consumption of fresh organic fruits and veggies
- o CSAs can spark an organic community through members blogging, posting pictures of their boxes, sharing recipes, etc.

Follow these simple steps to create your own CSA.

## Define Your Scope

- o Can your farm organize the CSA and supply all of its ingredients, or will you need to partner with multiple farms?
- o Do you want to be a seasonal or year-round CSA?

## Identify Your Target Audience

There are many consumer groups to market to but this does not mean that all of them are right for you. What neighborhoods do you want to sell your product in? Is that area already saturated with CSAs? What economic bracket does the neighborhood have? Will the neighborhood’s economic bracket affect your pricing? Are your target consumers business people, health-conscious moms, foodies, college students, or low-income communities? Identify the motivations and needs of your potential consumers and pick the consumer segment that best matches what you plan to provide.

## Define Your Delivery Method

Farmers have traditionally brought CSA boxes for pick up at the farmers’ market or arranged volunteers to host a drop-off site at their homes. You can also partner with community institutions like churches, neighborhood schools, or local businesses to host drop-off sites. Many grocery stores around the country are willing to create partnerships with growers, which can be a win/win for all involved.

Questions to consider:

- o How many choices should you provide to your consumers? How will these choices impact your staffing needs?
- o How many delivery sites will you offer? Will there be one or multiple delivery days?
- o Will you offer an option to deliver directly to your customers’ homes?



## Determine Subscription and Pricing Methods

The organization of your subscription will affect the design of your cropping plan and will depend on the seasonality of your production.

Questions to consider:

- o Do you want to offer the option to subscribe for certain seasons, or can you offer a year-round subscription? Accurate and timely records are essential for maintaining subscriptions.
- o Should you offer the option of choosing how many boxes people can receive or set the number offered?
- o Should customers be able to personalize what they want in their boxes?
- o Do you want to allow add-ons such as eggs, meat, bread, etc.?
- o How will you accept payment?
- o Do you want payment upfront for the whole season? Should upfront, full-season payments be at a discount?
- o Will you apply an additional charge for personalization or direct delivery options?

## Promote Yourself

CSAs provide an effective way to connect with consumers directly and share your story of why you farm organically. Make videos of your farm and post them on YouTube. Ask your subscribers to post recipes or preparation suggestions to your Facebook or Twitter page. Use social networks

**Tip:** Connect with your local community schools and their families. Create a pick-up site at a school and donate \$1 from each CSA box back to that school. Add an educational component to your box by explaining how the produce was grown. Your affiliation with the school may help you gain more subscribers.

to create an emotional connection with members and supporters. Finding new members is critical.

## Build Your Team

Once you have completed all the steps above you will have a good idea of what kind of team you need to develop your CSA program.

Consider the following questions for guidance:

- o How many people do you want on your team, and what positions will they fill?
- o Who will coordinate the CSA assembly on the farm? Who will manage subscriptions, take payments, and deliver boxes?
- o Do you need people to work at designated drop-off areas?
- o How will you handle volunteers? Are you looking for interns? Do you want volunteers to be part-time or full-time?

## Manage Your Subscriptions

Questions to consider:

- o Can you manage subscriptions with existing personnel on your farm or should you work with an online service?
- o Should you have deadlines for subscribing, or can people sign up anytime?
  - o Will your members still get a box if they sign up a week before the boxes are scheduled to go out or do they need to wait for the next cycle?
- o Can members put their box on hold if they go on vacation? Many people go on vacation or grow their own gardens and cancel their CSAs in the summer. Offer a partial share in the summer to retain customers.
- o If a member wants to cancel a subscription, how will that be processed?

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# breaking into the Restaurant Market

## Connecting Farm to Fork

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Working with chefs and restaurants can be an exciting way to bring your organic produce to consumers. A number of restaurants support healthy organic eating and are looking to source organic ingredients for their menus. Many large food service providers have a growing selection of organic products. If you love working with people and facing challenges head-on, then restaurants are right for you.

Grant Briens, owner/farmer of Heirloom Organic Gardens, Inc. has been providing organic produce to a variety of restaurants throughout California for the past 25 years. He offers the following advice to help you get started with restaurant sales.

### Find the Right Restaurants

Look for restaurants that share your philosophy. What is the image they are trying to project? Identify who they buy from and determine if your products can match their needs. You may need to adapt your techniques to earn and keep their business. Review the following questions to determine what restaurants are right for your business:

- o What kind of clientele are they likely to have?
- o How do they deal with the food they are preparing?
- o Do they have ingredients on the menu that your farm can offer?
- o If you work at a farmers' market, would they be willing to pick up product at your stand?

### Meet With the Chef

Know what the chef wants and be prepared to explain how you can uniquely meet their needs. In your first meeting with a chef, review their menu and consider asking them the following questions:

- o Is your menu seasonal or year-round?
- o Would you accept a substitute if a specific product is not available?
- o What are the size and quality preferences for your kitchen?
- o What storage options do you have at your kitchen?
- o How long do you need my product to last?
- o Are you familiar with my products?

Some chefs believe it is essential to have the same products year-round while others offer a seasonal menu.

Chefs may not be familiar with your goods so make yourself aware of all of the culinary possibilities for your crops. Be savvy and offer suggestions related to their menu.

### Share Your Farm Story – On the Menu and With the Chef

Ask chefs to list the name of your farm next to your ingredients on the menu. This will help educate consumers on the value of organic produce and keep them asking for more once they have tasted your delicious items.

### Take Time to Plan

Design your crop plan with the end goal in mind. Talk with the chef and find out what they like; become partners with them before you plant. You must choose to make certain sacrifices, which might involve reserving a portion of your

**Tip:** The restaurant industry is characterized by rapid changes in personnel; be aware that your strong relationship with a chef or a buyer can change suddenly. A shift in personnel may alter what the restaurant can and cannot do with their supply. Keep a log of products you have sold to the restaurant in the past, and have suggestions ready for the new chef.

products for the restaurant that you may have otherwise been able to sell through other channels. Initially, your costs may increase because the chef will have their own ideas about what they want to buy. It takes time to learn their preferences and you may need to adapt your crop plan and harvesting techniques several times before you get it right. Have patience and evaluate if the rewards of price premiums are worth the trouble.

## Develop a Strong Delivery Plan

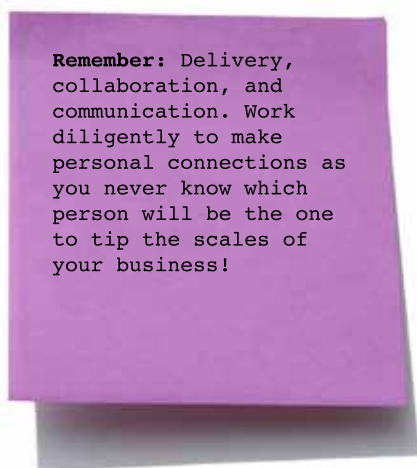
Once you have secured several restaurant buyers, coordinate an efficient delivery route. Restaurants typically accept deliveries based on their food preparation cycles. Your delivery time may be dependent on whether the restaurant serves mostly lunch or dinner. Food preparation and storage capacity at the restaurant will also determine how frequently they expect delivery. Farmers' markets may provide an efficient distribution hub to local restaurants as some chefs may be willing to pick up directly from your stall.

## Be Patient and Persistent

Change will not happen overnight and your relationships with chefs and restaurants will take a few years to blossom. Hold the vision of what you want in your mind and walk towards it with resolve. Selling to restaurants requires you to simultaneously be a farmer, produce manager, wholesaler, and salesperson for your products. Be prepared to wear many hats.

## Work on Payment Options

Many restaurants are known to be slow payers so start with small orders and develop a consistent payment pattern before allowing large purchases.



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# how to sell to Retail

## Fostering Your Retail Relationships



Mark Mulcahy, an organic retail consultant for 15 years, has led numerous workshops on grower-retailer relations, and developed local grower-retailer programs nationwide. He always starts with a quote from Denesse Willey of T&D Willey farms: “A good deal is a good deal for all parties.”

With this as a guideline, you can transform challenges into positive and sustainable relationships. Problems arise between growers and retailers because of a grower’s lack of understanding of retail operations, unclear expectations from the retailer, and poor communication on both sides.

Below are suggestions for developing strong relationships with a retail partner.

### Take a Walk

Visit the produce departments of the stores with which you want to work. Ask yourself:

- o How is the produce displayed?
- o Is the department full, abundant, and well-culled?
- o Is the display complementary to the produce?
- o Does the display make you want to shop there?
- o Do they have attractive point-of-purchase materials?
- o Are the employees friendly and knowledgeable?

If not, you may want to reconsider as the look of their produce department can speak volumes about how your produce will be handled and sold. Do they sell a lot of bagged fruit? What about more exotic items? Would your product fit there?

### Do Your Homework:

Determine the lead contact. In a smaller store under 15,000 sq. ft., your lead contact is probably the produce manager, whereas in a larger store between 15,000 and 30,000 sq. ft., it could be a designated buyer. You may have to go through a produce coordinator or central distribution center for stores

**Tip:** Most managers and buyers are busy in the morning with stocking, inventory, etc. Call in the afternoon to introduce yourself and set up your meeting.

larger than 30,000 sq. ft., or if they’re part of a chain. Don’t stop at produce. Many prepared foods departments are now doing more direct buying, and that contact could facilitate access to the produce department. Once you’ve established the correct contact, call to schedule a convenient time to meet.

### Prepare for an Introductory Meeting

Consider asking the following questions:

- o What kind of food do you specialize in? Gourmet? Organic? Local?
- o Do you buy from local growers? If so, whom?
- o Who is your clientele?
- o How long have you been in business?
- o What are your signature departments?

Important to cover:

- o Delivery - Do you have delivery hours? Who is your contact person? Where do you take deliveries?
- o Ordering - What days (and hours) do you order? What is the cut-off? Should you communicate your availability via email, fax, phone call, or an online ordering system (ex. Local Dirt, [www.localdirt.com](http://www.localdirt.com))?
- o Quality standards - Do you like certain sizes of apples? Does the chard sell better when bunched to a certain size?
  - o Packaging - What are your packing standards? Do you save boxes? Are you willing to accept RPCs (returnable plastic containers)?
  - o What are your payment terms?

Items to bring to your meeting:

- o A current copy of your CCOF certificate

- o Samples! Produce and kitchen managers love to try before they buy (note: if they don't, maybe they are not the right retailer to sell your products). Bring enough to share with the floor staff as having their support will impact how your product is sold.
- o A yearly or seasonal production schedule
- o A wish list for the retailer and your farm. Is there something they want grown for them? Are there crops you've been thinking about trying? Come with recipes, information about your farm and crops, and tips for consumers on preparing your produce. If it's a value-added product, such as a special sauce, offer creative serving suggestions to help the retailer promote your item.

## Share Your Story

Come prepared to share the story of your farm. People want to hear the real life context of your business. Stories make you and your farm real! Ask yourself the following questions when developing your farm story:

- o Where are you from?
- o What is the history of your farm?
- o Is it a family operation?
- o What kinds of animals, if any, live there?
- o Do you have any anecdotes or memorable moments? Bring pictures. If you have a website, direct them there. For a personal touch, invite them to visit your farm or ranch.

## Know Your Numbers

Retailers are knowledgeable about their department's financials. They can explain why they price their products at specific price points and how much income they need to run their departments, meet sales margins, and achieve labor goals. Some growers, however, cannot tell what it takes to run the farm, which puts them at a disadvantage in financial negotiations.

## Be Flexible

Perhaps you grow slicing tomatoes but the store already has slicing tomato growers. Keep the conversations going. How about an heirloom, roma, or small-economy tomato grower? They may have a red and green chard grower, but what about gold or rainbow? Get creative and be flexible; once you're an established seller, other opportunities may emerge.

## Be Reliable and Show That You Care

Reliability is critical in maintaining positive relationships with retailers. Be on time to meetings, fulfill requested orders, and communicate issues or concerns directly with your lead contact. Show an interest in the retailer's business. Ask how sales are going and what goals they may have. Learn their mission. Express your gratitude and pay compliments. Like farming, retail operations are complex and multifaceted. With the right tools, knowledge, and attitude you can build long-lasting relationships.

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# Wholesale

*markets*

## *Strengthening Wholesale Relationships*

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Bu Nygrens, Co-owner and Purchasing Manager of Veritable Vegetable, the nation's oldest distributor of organic fruits and vegetables, offers her advice to organic producers on how to work with wholesale markets based on her experience of over 30 years.

When working with a wholesaler it is important to understand that your product may be shipped over long distances. Ensuring the quality and freshness of your product is as important as establishing strong relationships with your wholesaler. The following are her suggestions for growers entering into the wholesale market.

### Build Trust with Buyers

Any working relationship is built on trust. Knowing your buyers and their operations will help clarify expectations and ensure success. If possible, meet your buyers in person and take some time to get to know their business, values, and goals. The clearer the agreements you establish, the clearer the expectations will be as you do business together. Explore price structures, transparency, information sharing, and problem solving, such as credits and adjustments, in advance of doing business. This will help build a stronger working relationship.

### Understand Your Markets

Walk the closest large-scale terminal market in your area and see what is coming off the trucks and how it is handled. Look at what everyone else is doing and identify what distinguishes your product from others. Know your competition!

### Be Judicious with Postharvest Handling/Cooling

Just about all fruits, melons, corn, and greens require cooling prior to shipping. For greens, trimming and bunching should be consistent throughout the pack. If you sell bunched roots, bunched greens, bunched green onions, and/or lettuce, it will need to be hydro-cooled. Broccoli requires sophisticated icing. Proper cooling will increase the shelf life of your produce and ensure that it is fresh all the way to the end consumer.



### Know the Right Pack!

Packing your product professionally with consistent sizing, grading, and quantity in each box is key. Standard packs exist for just about all produce items but may vary from region to region. If you are unsure how to pack your crops, talk with your local wholesalers. Know how to build a pallet and get it on a truck. It is critical that your pallet be packed securely to avoid any damage to your product during transport and handling.

### Assess Truck Accessibility

Discuss transportation with your wholesaler to see if they can pick up directly from your farm or if you will need to bring your product to the wholesaler's warehouse. Also, look into whether or not there are any potential pick-up locations closer to your farm.

### Manage Quality Expectations

An attractive presentation, uniform sizing, and consistent maturity are all critical for wholesale business. Utilize tools like the refractometer, which measures sugar content of fruit, to ensure you are harvesting at peak flavor. A ruler can be used to measure the length of stems and leaves, or the diameter of heads (like broccoli, cauliflower) to ensure standard or desired pack size. Most importantly, use a knife to cut and taste your produce! Additional tips:

- o Make sure your boxes are sturdy and the right size and shape for the product you are packing. Use waxed boxes when necessary for leafy greens or iced products.

- o Proper pallet construction is key. Use standard box counts per layer, standard layers per pallet, and use pallet wrap or ties to secure the load.

## Know the Labeling Requirements

Wholesale packages, boxes, or bags require legible labeling that includes:

- o Responsibility: the farm, grower, or label name and location
- o Identity of the contents: variety or product name
- o Quantity: net weight or count per package
- o Certification agency of the grower or packer, if sold as organic
- o Country of origin

## Determine Your Price and Availability

Evaluate what you grow, how much you expect to have, and when you expect to have it. Keep track of your cost of production in order to help you determine your asking price. Nothing replaces regular interactions with your customers to discuss price and quality trends.

Staying abreast of current market prices will assist your pricing structure; this information is available through the Rodale Institute Pricing Index. Current market conditions are available through several media publications such as "The Packer" newspaper and the USDA website. Also, you may want to consult cost calculators such as the Rodale Institute Crop Conversion Calculator ([www.rodaleinstitute.org/cropcalculator](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/cropcalculator)) to help you determine a fair price for your product. See our resources on page 18 for more help.

## Paperwork is Just as Important as Money

Work with your wholesaler to learn what paperwork is required for your transaction. Typically you must provide an itemized Bill of Lading or invoice with each shipment. All paperwork requires a purchase order number, which is typically assigned by the buyer in advanced of shipment. Additionally:

- o Send invoices regularly and on time
- o Know the terms of payment before you enter a transaction
- o Keep good records of your expenses and receivables

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# accessing Export markets

## Organic Across Borders



Taking the leap into the international marketplace can be difficult. Some of the unique challenges you will face include the barriers related to international regulations, finding distributors and buyers, and the cost involved in developing new markets. Many countries have developed their own standards for organic food; however, over time there has been an increased uniformity in organic regulations and equivalency agreements. CCOF's Global Market Access (GMA) program and International Standards program offer certification to these various standards for CCOF certified members. Full details on these programs can be found at [www.ccof.org/international.php](http://www.ccof.org/international.php).

CCOF certified member Taylor Brothers Farms is a leading producer and global distributor of organic prunes and prune products. As a member of the GMA program, they have successfully distributed their organic products throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. John Taylor shares his own insights on how to successfully export organic goods. Consider these questions when getting started:

- o Product Handling - What are the logistics involved in trucking, shipping, and storage? Is the storage cold or common? Is the humidity high or low?
- o Environment - What is the environment like where you are shipping? How will the climate affect your product?
- o Shelf Life - What do you need to maintain the quality of your product?
- o Travel Distance - How well does your product handle a lengthy transport?
- o Culture of the Receiving Country - How will they use the product? Will the population require education to understand your product and its usage? How much time and money do you want to invest in consumer education and advertising?
- o What is Your Product's Usage? Is it for retail, food service, or industrial use? Who is the end user? How will it be used or cooked? How is it presented? Does it have nutrition appeal, an organic focus, or health benefits? Is it an everyday food?
- o Demand - What is the demand, or does demand need to be created? Is the main focus to present something new and different to the marketplace, or to present a better version of what already exists?

"Consider all of these questions as stepping stones towards developing your exporting business strategy. Anticipating your needs for export will help you avoid common pitfalls and mistakes. The CCOF Global Market Access program helped us gain access to foreign markets that we would have struggled to access on our own." - John Taylor

The first container is always the hardest to ship and causes the most anxiety. The good news is that once you are accepted, import buyers are good customers. Be sure to find someone who is willing to spend the time and effort to promote your product. Double-check each of these steps to ensure proper exporting to a foreign country. Individual country's laws and regulations may be unfamiliar to you, challenging your otherwise ideal plan. When you lay out your plan for exporting, familiarize yourself with the laws and regulations of the foreign market and read over the following key points.

### Anticipate Timing

It can take up to two months for a shipment to reach your country of choice. From there, it has to be distributed to the wholesalers and then to retailers, which takes a period of time. If you want payment soon or upfront, you may have to discount your product until a relationship is established. Do not expect anything to happen quickly, especially if it is a new product intended for a new market.

### Be Aware of Foreign Packaging and Label Laws

These laws can be very strict and your product must be approved by the importing country. In addition, your product must meet the organic labeling requirements of the importing country and in some cases, also the NOP labeling requirements. Plan to have label approval done early in



the process in order to avoid having to backtrack and make corrections after the processing of your product has begun. This can be a costly mistake but is one that is easily avoided with proper planning.

## Ensure That All Products Meet the Buyer's Standards

With the long distance involved in sending out your product, the last thing you want is to have your product shipped back to you. This can take up to a year and the loss in sales, the effort to correct the packaging or product, and the overall lost time can be prohibitively expensive. Remember, re-working processed goods eats up your hard-earned profit.

## Recordkeeping is Very Involved For Exporting

Expect twice the amount of paperwork to get products into a country than to market them domestically. It is important to keep track of all export certificates and importer approvals. Having a good freight forwarder can save time and effort as they are able to prevent shipments from getting hung up in storage or delayed at the ports of entry. Freight forwarders can also help fix problems at the shipping and receiving ports.

Don't forget to fill out forms when shipping your products so the NOP can track USDA organic products being exported and imported. Organic commodity trade information is available at [www.fas.usda.gov/http/organics/organics.asp](http://www.fas.usda.gov/http/organics/organics.asp).

## General Requirements for Export

Organic fruit and vegetables must also meet the usual requirements concerning all exported fresh fruit and vegetables, whether organic or conventional. Some of these requirements include grade and quality standards, phytosanitary certification, and customers import clearance.

**Tip:** We suggest you take advantage of the many export programs designed specifically for the organic industry and offered by our partner, The Organic Trade Association. The OTA can help you with any trade barrier issues you may be experiencing. See the OTA website for further details at [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com).



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**Purchasing: Robert Lichtenberg**  
robertl@earlsorganic.com

**National Sales: Sandi Woessner**  
sandiw@earlsorganic.com

**Sales: Patrick Stewart**  
patrick@earlsorganic.com



# organic marketing Resource Guide



## General

**USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** administers programs that facilitate efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products including the National Organic Program, farmers' markets and local food marketing, and marketing orders and agreements. [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov).

**USDA Economic Research Service** provides a briefing room on organic agriculture including an overview of the organic market, organic production and costs, organic trade, and policy. [www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Organic](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Organic).

**The New Farm Organic Price Report** from Rodale Institute is an online tool that helps you price competitively. It publicizes weekly updates of prices for selected organic fruit, vegetables, herbs, and grains alongside conventional prices in the same region. [www.rodaleinstitute.org/Organic-Price-Report](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org/Organic-Price-Report).

**ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service** offers a full range of technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers prepare for organic production and certification. Their marketing business and risk management resources provide help with business planning, value-added production, cooperatives, and direct marketing. [www.attra.ncat.org/marketing.html](http://www.attra.ncat.org/marketing.html).

**"The Packer"** is the fresh fruit and vegetable industry's leading source for news, information, and analysis, reporting weekly since 1893. They publish annual reports on consumer trends and industry pack standards. [www.thepacker.com](http://www.thepacker.com).

**Produce Marketing Association** supports 2,500 members worldwide in the production, retail, distribution, and foodservice sectors of the fruit, vegetable, and floral industries. PMA conferences, trade shows, and seminars help bring buyers and sellers together to network and connect on supply chain collaboration, and increase sales. [www.pma.com](http://www.pma.com).

**The UC Small Farm Center** offers marketing resources for small-scale farmers on how to market through farmers' markets, marketing cooperatives, agritourism, farm stands, added-value, and niche meats. [www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/marketing](http://www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/marketing).

## Farmers' Markets

**The California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets** provides information for potential vendors plus basic rules and regulations for growers and market coordinators. [www.cafarmersmarkets.net](http://www.cafarmersmarkets.net).

**The California Department of Food and Agriculture** provides directory listings of Certified Farmers' Markets in California, including a producer's certificate application and list of markets by county. [www.cdffa.ca.gov/is/i\\_&c/cfm.html](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/is/i_&c/cfm.html).

**The Networking Association for Farm Direct Marketing and Agritourism** is a trade association dedicated to nurturing farm direct marketing. They provide online resources and networking opportunities through conferences, workshops, and events for growers in North America. [www.nafdma.com](http://www.nafdma.com).

**UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program** has information on sustainable community food systems, including direct marketing, farm-to-school, and farm-to-institution. [www.sarep.ucdavis.edu](http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu).

## CSA

**The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) Local Harvest: A Multifarm CSA Handbook** gives concrete details on strategies for forming and maintaining a multi-farm CSA, including advice on staffing, volunteer boards, distribution, and legal topics. [www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Project-Products/Northeast-SARE-Project-Products](http://www.sare.org/Learning-Center/Project-Products/Northeast-SARE-Project-Products).

**Local Harvest** is America's #1 organic and local food website. Local Harvest maintains a nationwide directory of small farms, CSAs, farmers markets', and other local food sources. [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org).

**Farmigo** is an internet-based system that makes farm-direct and community supported programs (agriculture, fisheries, dairies, bakers, kitchens) easier to run and more profitable. Farmigo provides an online dashboard for CSA managers to coordinate harvests, payments, orders, and deliveries. [www.farmigo.com](http://www.farmigo.com).

**CSAWare** is an online service for managing and tracking CSA programs. CSAWare is a flexible option for CSA managers. Shareholders can sign up and pay for their box online, order additional items on the farm store, and manage their account information. [www.csaware.com](http://www.csaware.com).

## Export

**Dictionary of International Trade** by Edward G. Hinkelman lists the requirements of shipping and handling all sorts of products, and includes the rules and regulations. Available from World Trade Press.

**Organic Trade Association Organic Export Directory** provides an online searchable directory of products certified to USDA organic standards including food ingredients, textiles, and agricultural supplies. [www.usorganicproducts.com](http://www.usorganicproducts.com).

**U.S. International Trade Commission** codes became effective in January 2011, offering key data for international trade on select organic products. These codes are published in the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States on the U.S. International Trade Commission's website, [www.usitc.gov/tata/hts/bychapter/index.htm](http://www.usitc.gov/tata/hts/bychapter/index.htm), and Schedule B of the U.S. Census Bureau, [www.census.gov/foreign-trade/schedules/b/index](http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/schedules/b/index).

**USDA Foreign Agriculture Service** offers organic trade commodity information including monthly data on international trade for select organic products and a complete list of organic trade codes. [www.fas.usda.gov/htp/organics/organics.asp](http://www.fas.usda.gov/htp/organics/organics.asp).

## CCOF Resources

Did you find this guide helpful? Consider participating in one of our webinars on similar topics for more in-depth ideas! Visit [www.ccof.org/programs.php](http://www.ccof.org/programs.php) for more details.

# Contributors

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This publication was written based on the expert content provided at the CCOF Annual Conference, *Growing the Organic Market*, February 18, 2011, in Ventura, California. The retail and export articles were adapted from the respective authors mentioned in the text.

## Morton Bernstein

*Farmers' Market Manager, Santa Monica Downtown Farmers' Market*

Morton Bernstein has managed the Santa Monica Downtown Farmers' Market for over 19 years. He began the market with 17 farmers and has grown it to 47, with average gross sales of over \$70,000 per week. The downtown market is one of four farmers' markets operated by the city of Santa Monica, for which he is a part time employee. Approximately 45% of the farmers at the market are certified organic; another 10% farm organically, but are not certified.

## Jeff Biddle

*Southern California Produce Director, Whole Foods Market*

Jeff Biddle has been working in natural foods stores since 1989. He joined Whole Foods Market in 1993 and is proud of the part that he has played in supporting the growth of the organic produce movement. Now the produce director in the Southern Pacific region of Whole Foods, Biddle is actively encouraging growers to consider the switch from conventional methods of farming to organic.

## Grant Brians

*Owner/Farmer, Heirloom Gardens*

Grant Brians brings 20 years of work in the technology industry and 30 years in farming to make a successful business, and advocate for sustainable agriculture, environments, and tasty food. Brians sells specialty vegetables and fruits through farmers' markets in the San Francisco Bay Area, wholesale, and produce brokers. He also has extensive experience selling his produce through the food service industry and to restaurants directly. 16 of the 19 Michelin-rated restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area purchase his produce.

## Robert BD Dautch

*Owner/Farmer, Earthtrine Farms*

BD Dautch started selling home-grown produce out of his garden in 1974. He moved to southern California

in 1984 and started Earthtrine Farm in 1986 with 18 acres of CCOF certified fruit and vegetables. Dautch now lives in Ojai, California, where he grows an additional 10 acres of mixed vegetables, certified by CCOF. Dautch began selling at farmers' markets in 1978 and quickly found farmers' markets to be his preferred form of marketing, along with word of mouth. He raised four children on the farm who have been eating out of the fields (and the soil) for the past 25 years.

## Ben Feldman

*Program Manager, Farmers' Market Program, Berkeley Ecology Center*

Ben Feldman has been the program manager for the Farmers' Market Program at the Ecology Center in Berkeley, California, since 2006. Prior to joining the Ecology Center, Feldman worked as both a farmers' market vendor and a market manager. He holds a Masters Degree in Environmental Science from the University of California, Riverside, and currently serves on the California Department of Food and Agriculture Farmers' Market Advisory Committee.

## David Gagnon

*Chief Operating Officer, Organic Trade Association*

David Gagnon is the chief operating officer for the Organic Trade Association (OTA). He has been at OTA for 10 years and has been involved with international trade issues for much of that time. Most recently, Gagnon worked with the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service and Korean government officials to successfully secure open trade with Korea for the next two years while a permanent solution can be negotiated.

## Dina Izzo

*Founder, Bludog Organic Produce Services*

Dina Izzo has over 30 years experience in the produce industry working as produce manager and buyer of New Leaf Markets and general manager of ALBA Organics, a wholesale distribution company focused on family-scaled organic farms. Dina is

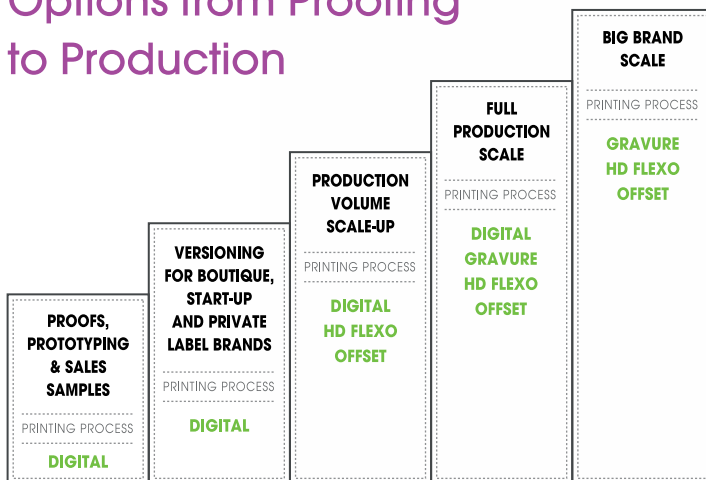
# Packaging is Key to Sales Success

**Small and regional brands can again compete with national brands.** From the 1950's until recently, television ads for big national brands easily captured the hearts and minds of American consumers. As a result of television advertising, consumers often knew the brand they were going to buy before they entered the store. Now that television is so fragmented, it's impact on consumer preference has been greatly reduced. Without a strong pre-programmed brand preference, the door is open for your product to do the selling at the point of purchase.

**Packaging's influence at the point of purchase is paramount.** Increasingly, the Fortune 500 big brand owners are placing more focus on, and allocating more dollars to, packaging. Successful smaller brands are also focusing on their packaging. They realize that effective packaging attracts, engages, and influences consumer buying decisions.

**Effective packaging is often defined by the label.** Creativity, coupled with an understanding of packaging options, are building blocks for effective packaging. Because the label is often the package focal point, great care should be taken as it is developed and purchased.

## Label Printing Process Options from Proofing to Production



We can help you apply the appropriate label printing process each step of the way.



# How to Create & Purchase Labels



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MULTIPLE MARKETS.

Here is a practical step-by-step approach to creating and purchasing labels. Begin helping your company and products gain attention and communicate your story!

**Step 1:** Consider hiring a graphic designer or design agency to create logos, colors, and content.

**Step 2:** Acquire design ideas from outside your product market. For example, if your product is gourmet chocolate sauce, don't hesitate to look at what is currently cool in wine packaging.

**Step 3:** Acquire and consider using different papers and materials, particularly those not used by your competitors. Papers are available with recycled content of 10% to 100%. Paper that delivers a metallic look without the cost or waste associated with foil stamping is also available.

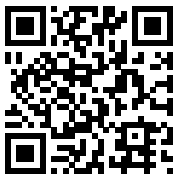
**Step 4:** Test. Test. Test. Ten years ago the cost to test print labels on one or more papers was thousands of dollars. Now, you can test many graphic and color variations for several hundred dollars and on multiple materials for less than a thousand dollars. This is a small price to pay for a preview of your packaging options. Test results can also be sent to potential retailers and distributors for their feedback.

**Step 5:** Evaluate print processes. Self-adhesive labels that come on rolls for easy auto or manual application are typically printed with Flexo or Digital technologies. Digital technology typically creates less waste while delivering more refined printing.

**Step 6:** Select a label print service provider that has multiple print process options and responsive service that will help guide you to packaging that is both distinctive and cost efficient.



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## Contributors— continued

the founder of Bludog Organic Produce Services, a consulting firm serving small-scale and beginning farmers to create and execute plans and strategies for profitable business.

### Sam Mayhew

*General Manager, Oxnard Lemon Company*

Sam Mayhew graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, with a degree in Ag Business Management, and has been working in the lemon industry for 36 years. The past 25 years, Mayhew has been the general manager of Oxnard Lemon Company. He has also been serving as a director of Sunkist Growers for the past 12 years.

### Eric Michielssen

*Owner/ Farmer, Pozo Organic Farm*

Born in Watsonville, California, growing up picking berries, cutting cots, and working in his grandparent's apple packing sheds, farming was not in Eric Michielssen's long-term career plans. After a stint in teaching and real estate development, the urge to nurture the soil and grow nutritious food got the best of him. Michielssen purchased 80 acres in 2002 and developed Clark Valley Organic Farm and CSA. Now, down-sized a bit, he farms 10 acres in Pozo, California, all solar and off-the-grid, growing specialty crops for fine restaurants and small stores in San Luis Obispo County.

### Julie Morris

*CSA Coordinator/Founder, Join the Farm!*

Julie Morris is the CSA coordinator and founder of Join the Farm!, a small organic farm on the Oxnard plain that began in 2009. She never imagined helping to run an organic farm but in her first year grew her CSA to over 150 subscriptions. An ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, Morris sees many parallels between serving a church and coordinating a farm project - both are about tending life, forming community, and being awed by the beauty and mystery that feeds us all.

### Mark Mulcahy

*Produce and Management Consultant, CDS Consulting; Co-host of "An Organic Conversation"*

Mark Mulcahy is an award winning retail consultant, educator, and organic advocate. He is a member of CDS Consulting Co-op, which provides produce consulting services to co-ops, independent retailers, and growers worldwide. Mulcahy is co-host of "An

Organic Conversation," a national radio show that airs every Saturday morning on 960 AM in San Francisco, California.

### Thomas Nelson

*Co-founder/President, Capay Valley Farm Shop*

Thomas Nelson is the co-founder and president of Capay Valley Farm Shop, a farm community-owned local foods aggregation company founded in 2007. Since 1991, Nelson has worked with farmers, NGOs, and small businesses to develop healthy communities and sustainable food systems. Prior to his current position, he was founding executive director at Capay Valley Vision, a coalition organizer with Community Food Security Coalition, manager of Full Belly Farm's CSA, and wore many hats at Community Alliance with Family Farmers. Nelson has a degree in business from University of California, Davis, where he focused on social entrepreneurship.

### Bu Nygrens

*Co-owner and Purchasing Manager, Veritable Vegetable*

Bu Nygrens is the co-owner and purchasing manager of Veritable Vegetable, the nation's oldest distributor of organic fruits and vegetables. Since 1978, Nygrens has contributed to the company's reputation for integrity, advocacy, and leadership. Woman-owned and operated, Veritable Vegetable serves local organic farms and independent retail businesses throughout California, Hawaii, and the Southwest. Veritable Vegetable promotes equitable and sustainable food systems for all people.

### Ryan Peterson

*Regional Produce Buyer/Supervisor, Jimbo's Naturally*

Ryan Peterson has been in the produce industry for 11 years starting as a night time produce clerk and working his way to Produce Buyer for Jimbo's Naturally food stores in San Diego County. "As Produce Buyer for Jimbo's Naturally, I have learned to work closely with local organic farms, nurture these relationships, and source the best tasting and highest quality organic produce available for our customers."

### Benzi Ronen

*Founder, Farmigo*

Benzi Ronen left his career in the hi-tech industry in order to follow his passion to increase the number of people eating healthy, fresh, sustainably-grown

food. He founded Farmigo, a web-based service that helps small farms to market, promote, and sell their products online while improving communication with their customers. Farmigo aims to help farms prosper, and build and strengthen farming networks. Ronen's expertise centers on using the Internet as a medium for telling stories and building community.

### John Taylor

*Partner/Vice President/Treasurer/Secretary, Taylor Brothers Farms, Inc.*

John Taylor has worked with his brother Richard at Taylor Brothers Farms since its founding in 1980. In addition to running the farms' prune and almond processing, Taylor ran an apple packing shed for nearly a decade. At Taylor Bros., he is responsible for coordinating certification, food quality, safety, and systems. He serves on the boards of the California Dried Plum Board, Tudor Mutual Water District, and the Northern California Growers Association, and is the former chairman of CCOF's Marketing Committee. Taylor is a graduate of California State University, Fresno, and the California Agricultural Leadership Program (Class 14).

### Deborah Yashar

*Senior Manager of Marketing & Communications, Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County*

Deborah Yashar serves as the senior manager of marketing & communications at Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, the oldest food bank in California and second oldest in the nation. Prior to Second Harvest, Yashar worked as the food systems program manager at the Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association (ALBA), where she supported the viability of small farmers through the development of markets and ALBA's branding and identity in the marketplace. Yashar has helped to establish nine certified farmers' markets and farm stands in both urban and rural communities, and spearheaded state-wide legislation to improve the affordability of farmers' markets through EBT card accessibility. She was a Steering Committee member of the California Food & Justice Coalition and currently serves on the board of directors for the Santa Cruz Community Farmers' Markets and the Certified Farmers' Market Advisory Committee of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

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Thomas B. Harding Jr., President  
125 West Seventh Street  
Wind Gap, PA 18091  
ph: 610-863-6700  
fax: 610-863-4622  
email: agrisys1@aol.com

**MIDWEST (Satellite office):**  
Alesia Bock, Associate Consultant  
P.O. Box 445  
De Forest, WI 53532  
cell: 608-345-1301  
email: agrisys2@charter.net

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