

Ferrari Tractor CIE

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RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The resurgence of Farmers Markets in both large and small cities has helped small scale growers to find better paying markets for their produce and other products. These markets allow growers to receive retail prices and become recognized resources and establish their brand face to face with customers. While the variety of products on display and for sale at the markets is large and increasingly diverse, it is only a fraction of what it could be if other infrastructure were available in these communities.

Communities interested in promoting a vibrant rural economy need to rebuild some of the infrastructure that once underpinned agricultural economies. These support organizations have largely disappeared through centralization of US food production and processing. Rural economics can truly prosper only when ever larger shares of the end product's value are returned to the producers of the ingredients. Under the current system a \$2 loaf of bread produces 5 cents for the wheat grower; a \$2 jar of jam contains pennies worth of fruit and \$10 a pound cheese contains the solids from 3 gallons of milk (24lbs), less than \$3 wholesale.

With access to a production facility the small scale producers of the food ingredients could produce ready to eat products and keep a larger part of the food price in the local economy rather than have it go off to some distant processor or packer. This idea is not new, in the 1930's and 1940's the Ball Jar Company put together canning equipment packages that were sold to local communities who were willing to put up a building set up for canning local produce. Detailed manuals gave instructions on correct and hygienic procedures for using the equipment such as the pressure kettles used to seal jars etc.

A logical expansion on these ideas would be to set up a commercial kitchen that complies with local health codes so that individual growers could produce baked goods, pickles, canned fruits and vegetables; frozen packages; dehydrated fruits, herbs and vegetables; roasted nuts and seeds; bottled juices; yogurts and cheeses; and oils.

A wing of such a facility could house a threshing machine, hammer mill, roller mill and seed cleaners and flour mills of stone and iron burrs. Another section could house a cider press and a wine press and perhaps coolers for holding crops for short periods until market day. Ideally this facility could be at or near the farmers open air market itself.

Carried to the next step such a facility could act as a lending "library" but instead of books it could rent machines that small startup farms cannot yet justify buying. For example a "grassland" or no till drill to plant pasture, cover crops to improve soil and prevent erosion, to plant hay and to plant forage crops for pastured chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, etc. as well as sheep, goats, pigs and cows. The same tool can plant grains for artisan bakers and organic feed producers. No single tool can help more kinds of small farms than such a drill because quality pastures are a key ingredient to high value enterprises, like seasonal dairying of goats, sheep, and cows fed nearly entirely on grass, these dairies are gaining importance and may be the future for small family dairies.

After the drill, hay mowers, reaper binders, balers, forage choppers with collectors and root crop diggers can be shared over a wide area. Each machine of the appropriate size can be mounted on its own 2 or 4 wheel low bed trailer that allows it to be pulled to the field where the grower can backup, attach tool to his tractor's 3pt and pick it up directly from trailer without the need for forklift or other hoist.

When done the tractor lowers tool back onto the trailer for return to “Library” quickly with little risk to machine or operator. Likewise manure spreaders, compost spreaders could be economically shared. To be sure as smaller farms grow, find their niche and otherwise take hold they will buy some of their own machines and no longer need this option but there will always be new enterprises starting up or converting from one crop to another who will be helped by such a “Library”.

FINANCING

The cost of bringing such an infrastructure into being will vary depending on local conditions and opportunities. For example there are often defunct restaurants or fast food premises that already meet local regulations such as health codes required for commercial kitchens. These can be bought or perhaps leased long term from their owners for less cost than creating them from scratch. The cost of buying or leasing might be put up by setting up a nonprofit corporation through local subscription much the way public radio and CSA’s are financed. Other contributors could be local service clubs, business improvement districts, and local and national business that will benefit long term by the development of improved local economy, feed companies might be an example of a national company to benefit.

Some other support may come from ecological farming organizations, local farm bureaus, Conservation Foundations, organizations interested in energy conservation especially if energy conserving technology like solar water heating etc. are part of the facility, Church based and other groups interested in food security issues, colleges with food technology courses could be resources to help tap into grants from public agencies and/or private foundations. For example the Getty Foundation is reportedly helping finance a Northern California land preservation scheme that includes a mixed income housing project that is built around a 20 acre organic farm to supply a local food source and a layout that reduces use of petroleum based transport while preserving several hundred acres of woodlands.

In general then, bringing such an infrastructure into being is likely to require that it serve as many different interests as possible in order to gather the needed economic resources and community support to get it started. Longer term fees from users will need to be devised so that it becomes a self-sustaining entity.

Until then,

Eugene F. Canales