

OFARM: MARKETING OPTIONS FOR ORGANIC FARMERS

by Oren Holle and Carmen Fernholz

The Organic Farmers Agency for Relationship Marketing (OFARM), a Marketing Agency in Common, (MAC), has been engaging in conversation with MOPC and MOA to embark on a collaborative process to create a Montana connection to the OFARM Family of Cooperatives; currently three autonomous co-ops which comprise the OFARM membership. OFARM might be more simply described as an umbrella organization that coordinates but does not dictate the marketing programs of its member co-ops.

A broad base of producers makes up the three current organic cooperatives of the OFARM network. Together they produce, process, deliver and sell millions of dollars' worth of organic grain each year across the USA. These cooperatives include Midwest Organic Farmers (MOFC) based in Illinois, Central Plains Organic Farmers (CPOF) based in Kansas and NFOrganics based in Iowa. In total these co-ops represent, engage in, and do business with nearly 500 producers, along with processors and buyers in the organic grain supply chain community. Wholesale grain production, supply, sourcing, sampling, testing, sales, logistics, delivery, marketing program support, value added processing, are all activities and responsibilities supported by current and ongoing producer involvement and education. In short it is the best farmer owned and managed organic supply chain network system in the country.

Producers in this network are primarily in the Great Lakes region (Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio), Great Plains region (Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Missouri, Oklahoma,) and the upper Midwest (Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Dakotas). These cooperatives reach, connect with and market grain products to buyers in markets across 25 states including east and west coasts, southern states and states in the upper Midwest and Great Lakes regions. On occasion there are some limited transactions with Canada.

The cooperative structure, trusted relationships and operational processes within this network are components that serve to maintain a high level of integrity, communication, trust, and transparency throughout the organic supply chain in which OFARM's Co-op Members operate. Each Co-op Member's staff place a high priority on directly serving their member producers to further enhance the rural communities in which they live. Many of the relationships with buyers, grain millers, trucking companies, processors, customers, and advocates in the organic community are well developed and long standing; attributes that reflect the rural community-oriented nature and culture of OFARM. Overall, it is an established, mature organic marketing community that is well positioned and suited to collaborate with others who share its many values including being a cooperative, long term relationships, integrity, stewardship of resources and rural communities.

OFARM continually strives to improve on its Plan, Program and Process to provide an opportunity for producers to have increased control over their economic destiny in a constantly changing market environment.

It is OFARM's intent to provide an opportunity for Montana organic producers to become a part of this collaborative endeavor. It is our hope that OFARM would be able to provide these mutual benefits across an expanded area of influence to improve and protect the interests of producers as they embrace the opportunity to participate in cooperative marketing and the marketing management services OFARM is confident it can provide.

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