

LOCAL FARMER NETWORKS: GENERAL TIPS

- The number one biggest challenge to developing a local network is TIME. So, consider:
 - lay the foundation for the network in the winter when folks are likely to have the time to get involved
 - find ways to share the responsibilities, and/or adequately compensate and thank network organizers
 - get help from non-farmer organizations that support local farmers
- Start small. Don't take on more than you can handle at first, and then grow from there.
- Communication is essential, keep the lines open! Consider what ways are best for the farmers in your area to keep in touch.
- Engage your neighbors, even if they farm in a different way
- If your network activity requires funds, consider different ways to raise funds (membership dues, sponsorship/partnerships with local business, extension office, etc)
- Find ways to balance inclusiveness with focused membership -everyone has something to share, but you want to get the most out of your time as possible.
- Farmers may find it most useful to form networks based on shared characteristics, for example having similar practices or using similar marketing strategies such as CSA or farmers markets.
- Discuss competition and develop an understanding. One farmer said about his local network 'we all understand that it's an open market, but we try not to step on other people's toes too much, we don't purposefully undercut each other's prices or directly target other people's customers.'
- Think carefully about what a) you, b) other farmers, and c) consumers need/want.
- Be open: there is a broad spectrum of possible activities you can take on
- Be patient: organizing a network will take some time and resources
- Think carefully about the leadership and succession. If the network is largely sustained by one or a few people, what happens if they must stop for some reason? For the network to be sustainable, make sure you share the work or have a plan for the next person/people to take on more responsibility.
- Involve well-established farmers as well as newer ones. The established farmers have valuable knowledge and experience to share, and newer ones can bring energy and fresh perspectives.
- Find ways to make your network fun and enjoyable, as well as efficient.