

Division of Marketing
Agricultural Development and Diversification (ADD) Program

1992 Grant Final Report

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Certified Organic Food Production & Processing

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I. Original intent of Organico Food Processing Project and perceived benefit to Wisconsin agriculture.

The intent of this project is to develop alternative agricultural products using organic production and processing techniques. By using a small scale state certified food processing facility we experiment with and produce new certified organic food products that can be made from locally grown fruit and vegetable crops. The perceived benefit is to help expand organic agriculture by providing area organic farmers access to canning and food dehydration facilities. Farmers will increase production of produce since they will be able to give the food durability by canning and dehydration. Processing of the crops in the cannery will extend their marketability and give them added value.

II. Summary of how the project achieved the following:

A. Jobs.

The cannery helps contribute to the jobs of area fruit and vegetable farmers by processing and marketing their crops into various products. It is anticipated that when Organico has a well established label and products, farmers will expand production to meet the consumers demand for our certified organic products. Several full time jobs will be available in the cannery. These jobs include lab workers, a manager, and a marketing director. As the cannery is established, it expects to have educational programs to educate consumers of the need for organic foods. We will be promoting the benefits of organic agriculture and warning of the hazards of agrichemical agriculture. This project has minutely contributed to the jobs of equipment suppliers and will continue to create collateral employment in packaging, labeling, and distribution.

B. New capital investment or expansion of the agriculture industry.

The building where the cannery is located was remodeled to bring it up to the state code for a food processing facility. Investments were plumbing (including a waste water holding tank) construction of a bathroom facility, and a hot water heater. Food processing equipment was purchased- some new, some salvaged. A seed oil press was purchased.

Growers are investing in equipment to increase production or efficiency. One farmer bought a new cultivator for cultivating row crops. Other farmers will make similar upgrades as more markets are established.

C. Diversification or expansion of production or processing of agricultural products or new development of new agricultural products.

Organico has been and will continue to develop certified organic canned and dried foods. The emphasis is:

on developing products made from locally produced fruits and vegetables. Organico has established a recipe for salsa, salad dressing, relishes, catsup and fruit juice. We will make dried fruit and vegetable mixes as well as press canola oil. We are producing and processing more certified organic food than before.

F. Improvement of the competitive position of the Wisconsin agricultural industry.

Certified organic labeled products will be more competitive in the food industry as consumers learn about and demand food grown without harmful pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, as well as food processed without harmful preservatives.

G. Efficient use of farm land or other agricultural resources.

Organico will coordinate with small local farmers to grow fruit and vegetables for processing into products. This will increase the production of small farms. Also we will make the food processing facilities available to home gardeners so they will be able to process their surplus produce. By letting home gardeners use our food processing equipment, such as stoves, sinks, stainless steel pots, food processor, and pressure cookers, they will be able to preserve surplus produce for later consumption. Home gardens provide people with fresh, healthy produce during the growing season. The contribution of these small gardens to food production is substantial.

III. Discussion of project results.

The Organico food processing project is doing well. The facility has been licensed by the state as a food processing plant. Also the facility has been certified by the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA).

There have been a few unexpected problems. The process of getting a septic system for waste water through the Bayfield County Zoning Committee turned out to be long and complicated. A lot of paper work was required. Everything required so much paperwork. The building didn't have a bathroom so one had to be constructed. Last summers growing season was a surprise. It was the coldest summer on record. There was a frost on the summer solstice (the longest day of the year)!

IV. Description of informational or educational materials.

There were no educational materials made this year. During our second year, we will produce an informational program about how a community which could benefit from a small scale cannery could start one up. There will also be a field day which will feature pressing of seed oil. Canola oil pressing will be demonstrated at the facility on September 11, 1993. We will be offering an internship for a college student this summer. We will also work with

Northwest Wisconsin CEP Summer Youth Program to provide job training to a high school student in the program. Both the intern and the summer youth program student will have the opportunity to learn about canning and drying of fruits and vegetables. We are considering hosting a workshop to teach canning techniques.

V. Positive/ future projections as a result of grant funds.

As a result of receiving the grant funds, we have been doing the research of setting up a small scale certified organic food processing facility. We have been experimenting with making products out of locally produced, certified organic fruits and vegetables. We intend to keep producing certified organic products and begin marketing them.

We feel that many communities in rural areas could benefit from the establishment of small scale canneries in their area. This food production facility is a model that could be used to meet the needs that exist in other areas. The creation of similar canneries throughout the state and beyond will provide producers an incentive to grow crops for local processing and consumption. The establishment of several new jobs in each plant will result. We hope that the spread of small scale food processing facilities will reinvigorate the rural economy.

Ken Raspatnik

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