



www.oklahomafood.coop

Attention Oklahoma Farmers & Ranchers!

Producing for a LOCAL marketplace can be an additional source of revenue for your farm or ranch.

Here's our story. I could sell a TON of Oklahoma grown potatoes every month, at \$1.25/lb. Also . . . 2500 pounds of corn on the cob, 300 heads of cabbage, 1100 pounds of tomatoes (both paste and slicing), 600 pounds of carrots, 600 pounds of fresh peas and beans, 300 bunches of cooking greens, 600 heads of lettuce, 725 pounds of onions, 300 pounds of summer squash, and 500 winter squash. I need 750 pints of berries, 300 pounds of apricots, 600 pounds of apples, and 300 pounds of pie cherries. And 100 pounds of cornmeal, 400 pounds of dried beans, 660 gallons of milk, 80 lbs of hull-less oats, and 700 dozen eggs.

That's what my "grocery list of unmet demand" at the Oklahoma Food Cooperative looks like based on membership surveys in the fall of 2007. Our sales increased more than 100% each year, 2003-2007. **In 2008, we expect to sell a million dollars of local food and non-food products**, and by 2012, we will sell one million dollars a month – *if the production for the local market is there.*

Who we are and how we do business.

The Oklahoma Food Cooperative makes it easy for people to buy food directly from farmers via an internet shopping system and a volunteer delivery system. Customers **and** producers are members. We do not buy wholesale and then sell retail. Each producer is his or her own "brand" in the coop. You set your own retail prices. Members order products at our website from individual producers, so you can develop "brand loyalty" to your products among our customer members.

Each month's order always opens on the **first day of the month** at 8 AM, and always closes at midnight on the **second Thursday**. As customers order, producers can check their business online. On Delivery Day – always the **third Thursday** – producers bring their products to Oklahoma City packaged & labeled for individual customers. Our online system produces delivery labels for you so all you have to do is copy, paste, print, cut and attach them to your product packages. Our Coop volunteers sort the products into the retail orders in a "barn-raising-style" event that is truly a sight to behold. The food then goes out to 23 pickup sites across the state operated by more volunteers.

We have **3 producer routes** incoming to Oklahoma City on Delivery Day. The drivers pick up from producers along their routes, so producers in those areas do not have to come to OKC. The routes start in Enid, Tahlequah, and Tulsa. In the future we may add routes from Guymon, Hollis, McAlester, and Ada. We write you a check on delivery day for your products sold. If a producer sends products via our routes, we mail the checks. Once an item is checked in, if we lose or damage it during delivery, we pay for it. If a customer doesn't pay us, you get your money anyway. Instead of you finding customers, and delivering and collecting -- we find the customers, show them your products, organize the delivery, do the billing, and collect the money. You produce the food and cash your check. You pay us \$51.75 to join and then 10% of your sales. Is this a great deal or what?

Food With a Story

We do not sell anonymous mystery food. We sell food with a story – our story as the Coop, and your story as a producer. You may not think that you have much of a story, but our customers are interested in you and the issues of rural Oklahoma. If people want anonymous mystery food, they go to the supermarket. Our members expect something better.

Production Issues

No you don't have to be organic, but it helps. Our members are interested in buying local foods, but they also like "more natural" production systems. The less commercial fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides that you use, the more you will sell. The coop does not have a requirement that you be certified organic, but you must declare your production practices at our website so members can make informed decisions. Less chemicals = better sales.

Our once-a-month system is a challenge for vegetable producers, because vegetables don't wait for a once a month market. Consider growing vegetables that keep well (potatoes, pumpkins, winter squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, cabbage, etc.) We have several wheat and wheat flour suppliers, but we have no corn, rye, oats, or spelt grains/flours/meal. We have many requests for dried peas and beans – all kinds. Season extension works – many fall planted vegetables can be stored and sold all winter. We have customers who drive into Texas to find organic chicken feed for their household flocks! They want to buy organic chicken feed or feed ingredients from Oklahoma farmers. There's money on the table here waiting for people to pick it up.

No confined animal feeding operation products may be sold through our system. All meats and poultry must come from free ranging, naturally managed flocks and herds. Meats and poultry are transported frozen. We use dry ice and super-insulated ice chests. All meats/poultry must be processed in a state or USDA inspected facility.

You can sell prepared/processed added-value foods through the Coop, that are prepared in a health department certified and inspected kitchen. Any meats or eggs used as ingredients must come from free-ranging, naturally managed flocks and herds, but you can buy other ingredients (such as sugar) from the regular food distribution system. Some of our prepared food producers buy ingredients from other coop members for their products, and that is a major selling point with our customers. 100% Oklahoma content is not required for prepared foods, but more Oklahoma content = more sales.

We also sell non-food items, including crafts, fabric arts, quilts, decorations, jewelry, clothing, and games. The requirement on those items is that you must make them, we do not allow "distributorships" of regular wholesale goods through the coop. All Oklahoma Food Coop, products must be made or grown by the producers.

What's the next step?

To support our growth, we need more producers of all food items and increased production from our existing producers. So we need more beef, pork, poultry, eggs, dairy, vegetables, grains – if you can grow it and get it to Oklahoma City or hitch a ride for it with our route drivers, our members will buy it.

We are not a closed coop, anyone can join who meets our requirements. There is no limit on how many producers can sell a given item. We **verify the locality of the production, and strictly forbid buying basic food items from the wholesale market and passing them off as local production**, so you won't have to compete against someone who is cheating by passing off California commercial farm tomatoes as Oklahoma vine-ripened family farm tomatoes.

To apply to become a producer member of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. . .

- ★ Go to www.oklahomafood.coop . Click on BASIC, then JOIN, and fill out the application to become a basic member of the coop. The membership share which everyone buys when they join costs \$51.75. After completing this application and getting your member number, go to www.oklahomafood.coop/okfoodservice.php. Scroll down and you find a link to fill out an online application to become a producer-member.
- ★ When you complete the producer application, the information is sent to our Standards committee, which will make a recommendation to our Board of Directors. The board meets once each month and votes on new producers, so figure on at least a month for the application approval process. Don't wait until the last minute before harvest to apply!
- ★ We require that new producers come to one Delivery Day before their products can be sold through our system. We expect you to spend about 4 hours working with our delivery day volunteers, meeting the other producers, and discussing your product with our Standards and Producer Care committee members who are on-site. This way you get a good understanding of our distribution system and cooperative methods and nobody reinvents any flat tires.
- ★ We can provide advice on marketing & pricing your product. We want all of our producer members to earn a fair price for their products. We will help you tell your story so your products will sell.

Local Food is the next big thing in the grocery industry.

There is a huge unmet demand for locally produced food in Oklahoma's cities. Growing food and selling it direct to the public offers serious opportunities to people with small, medium, and large farms to diversify and increase their farm income. We provide excellent opportunities for new farmers – especially young farmers – to start small and grow. We are not afraid to start small, because we know that we "start small, or we don't start at all." Please contact us to discuss how your farm or ranch production can be marketed directly to Oklahoma customers through the Oklahoma Food Cooperative.

From our family farms, to your family tables.

*Bob Waldrop, president and general manager
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