

## **FEATURE – GROWER NETWORKS HELP RURAL RESIDENTS**

INTRO: A USDA-sponsored University project is developing small grower networks to keep people and profits in rural areas. The USDA's Pat O'Leary has more. (1:49) (1/08)

THE GORGEOUS ORCHIDS IN THIS GREENHOUSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE ARE A SYMBOL OF WHAT COULD BE FOR SMALL FARMERS. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION HERE DEVELOPED A NETWORK CONCEPT FOR GROWING AND SELLING CROPS.

Dan Kuennen, University of Maryland Eastern Shore: What we call now the Farmers Access to Regional Markets, FARMS. And basically what we have done is taken the poultry model of the integrated grower approach and applied that to the greenhouse network.

IT WORKS LIKE THIS: GROWERS BUILD GREENHOUSES OR HOOP HOUSES ON THEIR LAND, AND PRODUCE ITEMS, SUCH AS THESE ORCHIDS, FOR – AND WITH GUIDANCE FROM - AN INTEGRATOR COMPANY, WHO IN TURN MARKETS THEM.

Kuennen: The advantage to that firm is that they don't have to put up acres and acres of greenhouses. That is born by the local grower.

Pat O'Leary, USDA (Stand-up): This small grower network concept offers great potential for rural communities. It allows them to keep farmers in their area, producing high value, non-traditional crops.

Kuennen: It takes a very small amount of acreage for the high cash crops that you can grow. And I think one of the beauties of this model is that many have not had greenhouses and many have not even been farmers in the past.

SCHOOL OFFICIALS TOOK THIS MARYLAND SUCCESS STORY TO JAMAICA, WHERE LOCAL SPICE AND VEGETABLE PRODUCERS BEGAN TO PARTNER WITH LARGE FIRMS LIKE KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN.

Osbourne Francis, Jamaican Grower: A lot of people in Jamaica grow a lot of stuff but cannot dispose of it. With the network, you can grow your things and you know where to sell it. And you are sure that your money is safe.

Dawn Ottey, Rock Mountain Herbs, Jamaica: The network is not just helpful, it is vital for this type of operation to function. There is just no other way you really can do it.

Kuennen: Its applicability, as we're already demonstrating in Jamaica, which is a much harder market to work in, is that if it can work there it can work in most other places in the world, plus also domestically, anywhere in the United States.

IN PRINCESS ANNE, MARYLAND FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.