



Newsletter of the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: A project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)

The Internet is a Farming Tool

Today's farmers and ranchers are harnessing a powerful new set of tools for sustainable agriculture. The World Wide Web, listservs, and electronic newsgroups let community-based producers see what others are doing and share ideas. Web sites allow them to tell the stories of their farms and products to people all over the world. E-mail is an efficient and widely accepted way to contact colleagues and customers. This issue of ATTRAnews shows how farmers are using these new tools to build community-based sustainable agriculture.

Madison Farms Web site (www.madisonfarms.org) promotes the varied products and events of the family farms of Madison County, in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. A collaborative effort funded by several grants, the site links consumers to about 150 of the county's 1,500 small family farms. Visitors to the site are also directed to the region's farmers' markets and scenic destinations. At right is Will Osborne, of Palmer Ford Organics in Weaverville.



Marketing Farm Products on the Internet

More and more farmers, ranchers, and producer groups are using the Internet to increase their markets. They offer information about their farms on Web sites to show consumers what's available, while most actual sales still take place on the farm or by phone. Delivery is often at designated pick-up points, via community supported agriculture (CSA) buying clubs, or through local restaurants and grocery retailers.

Farmers can create and maintain their own Web sites or – much easier – they can list their farm and products on Web directories run by other people. Listings are usually free, and

offer exposure and publicity for the farm. The quality of these sites varies. However, a lower quality national site that is well publicized may attract more people to a farm listing than a top-quality local site that is not well publicized.

Local Harvest (www.localharvest.com) is an example of a comprehensive, well maintained group Web site. Launched in 1998 by Guillermo Payet of Santa Cruz, California, Local Harvest is a "living" directory of family farms, farmers' markets, and other small-scale, locally oriented food businesses. Farmers can update their listings at any time.

Local Harvest allows consumers all over the country to find local farms, farmers' markets, CSAs, restaurants, and food co-ops. The online store where customers order products for mail delivery offers options for local delivery or pick-up, enabling farmers to sell online to nearby customers.

Other nationwide farm-marketing directories include the New Farm's "Farm Locator" (www.newfarm.org/farmlocator), which helps consumers, brokers, restaurateurs, and other farmers find the farm services they're looking for, and *Farmstop.com*, which lists farms that welcome visitors. Many state departments of agriculture also offer online marketing directories.



The Rural Coalition's SuperMarket Co-op (www.supermarketcoop.com) is an online retail store front for rural, community-based agricultural cooperatives. For example, the Mileston Farmers Cooperative, based in Tchula, Mississippi, fell on hard times as cotton and soybean production became less profitable for small-scale producers. Now they're selling sweet potatoes, quilts, and other products through the SuperMarket. "Hopefully, we can be successful," said co-founder Sarah Davis, "because we're not going to give up. It's a community effort."

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Cultivate Your Markets with the World Wide Web

Producers who want to develop their own Web sites are faced with a baffling number of choices. What's the best way to navigate the maze of Internet service, site design, software, order fulfillment, customer relations, Web commerce, credit card processing, catalog creation, and inventory management? Here are some good places to learn about the options.

- **E-Commerce Digest:**

www.ecommerce-digest.com/ecommerce-software-packages.html

- **Agricultural Marketing Resource Center:**

www.agmrc.org/agmrc/business/operatingbusiness/emailmarketinglinks.htm

- **E-Commerce Product Review Guide:** <http://products.ecommerce-guide.com>

- **Small Business Development Center's E-Commerce Guide:**

<http://sbdcnct.utsa.edu/sbic/e-com.htm>

- **University of Minnesota's Access E-Commerce:** www.access-ecom.info

- **USDA's How to Direct Market Farm Products on the Internet**

www.ams.usda.gov/tmd/MSB/PDFpubList/InternetMarketing.pdf

Contact Errol Bragg, USDA

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Greentreenaturals.com highlights a small diversified farm in northern Idaho that supplies a number of local restaurants. Diane Green and her husband, Thom Sadoski, use the Web site to let people know about their products, Sunday brunches, workshops, and projects. The Web site also gives them a way to answer questions from other farmers. "We receive frequent requests asking us how to do what we do," Diane explains. "While, on the one hand, we do not want to give away the hard-earned knowledge that we have learned about being successful small-acreage growers, we feel it is very important that more people are exploring the possibilities of becoming farmers. We believe that our experience has value. We are proud of what we do."

Some of the Best Resources from ATTRA's AgWeb: The Ultimate Agricultural Research Directory

This online tool (www.attra.ncat.org/searchAgWeb.html) lists many of the best sources of information about sustainable and organic agriculture. If you need to solve a farm production problem, chances are good you can find answers at one of the sites on AgWeb.

- **Ecological Agriculture Projects:** <http://eap.mcgill.ca>

Canada's premier sustainable farming information center offers many notable resources on pest control and organic farming, including The Virtual Library and back issues of farm magazines.

- **Organic AgInfo:** www.organicaginfo.org

Compiled by the Organic Agriculture Consortium (OAC) and the Scientific Congress on Organic Agricultural Research (SCOAR)

- **Organic Eprints:** <http://orgprints.org>

Hosted by the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming

What Savvy Farmers Have Learned about Marketing on the World Wide Web

- The Internet can be an important part of doing farm and ranch business today.
- The Internet can increase sales for producers by increasing visibility.
- The higher the level of online service and quality a farm offers, the more

(see "Savvy Farmers" on page 3)

ATTRA Publications about Internet Marketing and Research

In addition to this list, ATTRA offers many more publications on marketing farm products and on sustainable agriculture. All are available for free from ATTRA at 800-346-9140 or www.attra.ncat.org.

- AgWeb: The Ultimate Agricultural Research Directory (only available online)
- Agriculture Business Planning Templates and Resources (RL042)
- Direct Marketing (IP113)
- Evaluating a Rural Enterprise (IP041)
- Enterprises Budgets and Production Costs for Organic Production (RL041)
- Green Markets for Farm Products (CT140)
- Organic Marketing Resources (IP124)

Looking for Different Online Farm Business Models?

Electronic subscription and delivery services are a niche that meets customer demand for high quality organic produce with the convenience of home delivery. These services avoid the problems faced by many CSAs of providing more produce than customers can use or too many items the customers don't like or know how to prepare. Companies like Boxed Greens of Arizona (www.boxedgreens.com) and Door to Door Organics (www.doortodoororganics.com), which serves the mid-Atlantic region and Colorado, offer both occasional and regular home delivery. Produce selection can be predetermined or customized for each customer.

Diamond Organics (www.diamondorganics.com) is an example of a larger scale organic food retailer that sells directly to consumers via mail order catalogs and the Internet. Founded in 1990, it offers a Web site with an extremely wide variety of organic produce, specialty items, and organic foods in all categories. Orders can be placed online or by telephone or fax and delivered the next day.

Blogs in Agriculture: A New Way to Exchange Ideas

By NCAT Agriculture Specialist Steve Diver
Weblogs, or "blogs," are simple text-based Web journals that allow anybody to post articles, news, views, and photos. These user-friendly platforms are one of the fastest growing segments of the Web in terms of public participation.

Blogs about farms and CSAs can be a good way for farmers and ranchers to keep in touch with their customer base and wider network. Stories and photos of ranches and farm life, livestock, and cropping systems are very appealing. In fact, farm photos are one of the all-time best outreach and networking tools. Digital photos on blogs make it easy to show a new product, conditions in a field, or how to set up a particular piece of equipment.

Many Web sites — some free — offer space for people to post their own blogs on the Internet. These Web pages are created automatically, so users don't need Web editing skills. Here are some entry points to the "blogosphere:"

Two Blogging Hosts: www.blogger.com/start, and www.blog-city.com/bc

Blog Directory and Search Engine: www.blogcatalog.com

— To find farm blogs all over the world, enter "farm" in the search box.

Science Blog: www.scienceblog.com/cms

Sustainable Table Blog: www.sustainabletable.org/blog

Use of Blogs in Extension: www.joe.org/joe/2004june/comm1.shtml

Farm and CSA Blogs

- Stonyfield Farm Organic Dairy: www.stonyfield.com/weblog
- Tom and Donna's Washington Farm: www.schoonoverfarm.com
- Willie Green's Organic Farm & CSA: www.williegreensorganicfarm.com/blog



Innserendipity.com showcases a rural Wisconsin business that runs an organic farm, an energy-efficient bed & breakfast, and related enterprises. Owners Lisa Kivirist and John Ivanko are leaders of the rural renaissance movement. "We've found both a local community and a global one," they say, "where people from around the world join us on the farm or utilize our Web site for ideas on a similar journey."

Internet Tools for Farm Communication and Research

A Web page is a modern business card. The Internet also provides many other worthy tools for sustainable agriculture. Farmers and ranchers are creating e-mail newsletters for their customers and CSAs, announcing crop availability and farm events. This is a chance to let readers know about critical issues that affect agriculture. Creative authors can produce highly entertaining newsletters, like the vivid tales of life at the Two Small Farms CSA (www.twosmallfarms.com).

The Internet offers farmers the chance to do their own research about challenges they face on the farm. By joining "listservs," discussion groups, and Web forums, producers can exchange information on practical farming and ranching topics. Portals like ATTRA's AgWeb (www.attra.ncat.org/searchAgWeb.html) provide access to scientific research and agricultural databases.

Producers can find the latest market news on the Internet, too. New Farm's Organic Price Index (www.newfarm.org/opx) tracks the prices of conventional and organic products in several U.S. cities. Grassroots reporters also post the week's prices from many farmers' markets across the nation. Some Web sites, such as www.oatlink.com, bring together buyers and sellers of specialty produce.

Savvy Farmers... continued from page 2

investment and expertise is required.

- Producers need to be sure their customers are willing to pay for this level of service.
- Freshness and organic certification are important competitive advantages.
- Delivery areas may need to be limited to ensure freshness and avoid adding costs.
- Delivery and sales at farmers' markets or central pickup points can cut costs.
- Experience in order fulfillment through farm mail/catalog order is an advantage.

Rooster Hill Farm's Web site (roosterhillfarm.com) includes a blog, with online archives that go back to 2000. The New York farm raises poultry, goats, and pigs. They also cut lumber with a mobile mill and produce other items for sale. "The blog is an easy way to reach our customers," farmer Mo Barger says. "Since we live out in the sticks, it gives folks an easy way to see what we are doing. The blog actually started as pictures of the garden from year to year so I could manage rotation and evaluate my experiments with things. Then it grew and grew to what it is today."



Samples from recent Rooster Hill Farm entries:

June 27, 2005: I added some fencing to one of the coops. They get so hot during the day that I like to have them out in the shade of the long grass. I need to contain them because the roosters in this group do NOT play well with others.

June 19, 2005: We had such big plans for this wood. We were going to redo our hay wagons which sorely need new wood sides. These logs were wide enough and long enough to do it.





Use the Web to Learn about Sustainable & Organic Agriculture

- Find information about farm products, their nutritional value, history, and ways to use them
- See what others are doing, what farmers and ranchers produce, how they grow and market it
- Research market, pricing, and demographic trends
- Locate sources of organic supplies and services

Using Search Engines

A search engine is a tool that locates information on the World Wide Web. Enter keywords to find Web sites that contain those words. For example: "CSA," or "potato production-organic," or "Colorado potato beetle." To explore the Internet, bookmark your favorite sites and follow their links.

Popular search engines for agricultural information include:

www.agWeb.com

www.google.com

www.AlltheWeb.com

www.yahoo.com

Evaluating the Quality of Information on the Internet

Be aware that anyone can post anything on the Internet, and that not everything you read on the Internet is credible. Many sites only exist to sell an idea or a product. Before believing what's on a site, consider the source and the date.

Internet Training Offered by NCAT

Much of the information in this ATTRAnews is based on a series of special training sessions conducted by NCAT staff this past spring. Holly Born, Janet Bachmann, Julia Sampson, Nana Mejia, and Teresa Maurer presented the workshops to help farmers use the Internet for marketing. The Internet Based Services Project involved participants from seven southern states representing 11 organizations that serve limited resource and women farmers. The project was part of a training partnership with the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, who received funding from the USDA Risk Management Office of Outreach. If you would like to learn more about the workshops or training materials, please contact Teresa Maurer at 1-866-442-6085 or teresam@ncat.org.

New and Updated ATTRA Publications

- ◆ Colorado Potato Beetle: Organic Control Options (CT107)
- ◆ Forms, Documents and Sample Letters for Organic Producers (IP276)
- ◆ Seed Production and Variety Development for Organic Systems (IP272)
- ◆ Soil Management: National Organic Program Regulations (IP270)

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