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2007 Florida Small Farms Study Tour –
Regulatory and Business Lessons Learned

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Because small farmers represent such a large Extension clientele group (the majority of Florida’s 44,081), an in-service training tour was developed to learn the components of success in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. A detailed report is available from the authors. What we’d like to share are the regulatory and business environments that we found when 24 successful small farmers were interviewed in these three states during the tour in May 2007.

Regardless of the agricultural product produced (cut flowers, herbs, organic, specialty crops, milk and their products, livestock, etc.) we found a strong partnership between producers, the chambers of commerce, and the departments of agriculture.

The Chamber of Commerce supported small farmer success by:

- Financial support
  - Negotiating initial location of farmers markets
  - Establishing supportive referral infrastructure
- Political support
  - Organizing the farmers in order to market their product regionally
  - Farmers being active members in the local Chamber of Commerce
- Advertising support
  - Regional and local displays featured local, unique, agriculture
  - Brochures featured the local agriculture
  - Events featured the local and unique agriculture

The State Department of Agriculture modified their regulatory and collaborative support systems in methods that encouraged small farmer success. The concept of the family farm and locally grown products was integrated into:
- Farmers’ market establishment (financial grants, tents, signage, fencing, etc.)
- Producer education
  - Regulatory issues and compliance
  - Product processing
  - Food safety, etc.
- Marketing campaigns of locally grown produce
  - Certified South Carolina [http://www.certifiedscgrown.com](http://www.certifiedscgrown.com) (for example)
  - North Carolina Farm Fresh (Goodness Grows in NC) [http://www.ncfarmfresh.com/links.asp](http://www.ncfarmfresh.com/links.asp) (for example)
- Developing regulatory allowances for small farmers so product could be sold directly to consumers at farmers markets, off-the-farmer, and to restaurant chefs
  - Milk and milk products
  - Poultry and eggs
  - Meat
  - Baked goods

As a result of the lessons learned, the Extension Agents and Specialists on the tour have modified their approach to Extension education to include the regulatory and business community partnership clientele. By sharing our findings in this article, we hope that all Extension Agents and Specialists can include the partners needed to help Florida’s small farmers succeed.

Agricultural enterprise success depended heavily on supportive regulatory and business partnerships.
Reference: