Differentiating Small Farm Produce Offerings through Nutritionally Superior Cultivars, Marketing, and Extension Programs

Cecil Stushnoff, Pat Kendall, Dawn Thilmany, and Frank Stonaker

Summary of Project Activities

Direct marketing is integral to the prosperity of most small and medium-sized fresh vegetable producers. Our goal is to examine whether the perceived health benefits of nutritionally superior vegetables can be important to market competitiveness of small farms, and if organic or conventional management practices result in differing nutritional value of these crops. First we will analyze the antioxidant health properties of 10 cultivars (varieties) for each of six vegetables commonly sold through direct marketing channels: broccoli, garlic, lettuce, melons, spinach, and tomatoes. Within this sampling of varieties we expect to discover considerable variation and diversity of antioxidant nutritional properties. Varieties with exceptional properties may provide a competitive supply niche for producers. These vegetables will be simultaneously grown on paired organic and conventional plots over two production seasons. The control of weeds and critical pest control variables unique to organic or conventional practices will help identify those that may be responsible for antioxidant nutritional differences. We will also conduct taste panels on promising varieties to assess consumer acceptance. Using a national survey and consumer panels, the team will assess consumer demand for nutritionally superior produce. Estimates will be developed for willingness to pay for this differentiated product and evaluate potential labeling, promotion and educational marketing strategies. Finally, we will develop appropriate educational materials for small farm producers to influence adoption of produce varieties with superior nutritional quality, and assist with educational programming to help producers promote these new produce lines to consumers.

For more information contact Cecil Stushnoff at Cecil.Stushnoff@Colostate.edu