

1. Bird, Blossom & Berry Subscription Program Final Report
SARE Farmer/Grower Grant # FNE-00-331
Madeline Cantwell, on behalf of The Morris Farm Trust

2. The goals of the Bird, Blossom & Berry Subscription program at The Morris Farm Trust during the 2000 growing season were the following: to encourage local, seasonal eating in the Wiscasset area; to remind residents in our area of the local availability of some staple foods; to provide a local, organic alternative to chemical-intensive, foreign-grown flowers; to educate participants about the challenges of small-scale, organic food production; to investigate the viability of subscription marketing of fresh food as an alternative marketing strategy in midcoast Maine; to identify and demonstrate the risks associated with those strategies; and to multiply the effects of what was learned in the program.

3. The Morris Farm Trust's farming operation is essentially the same as described under question two in the original grant proposal. The major changes since the proposal was submitted have been in personnel. The Farm Manager, Rick Harding, left the farm for another job in August, 2000, and the position of Garden & Outreach Coordinator (which was previously the Store Manager-Educator position) was eliminated in September.

4. While all of the staff at The Morris Farm lent their support in some way to the Bird, Blossom & Berry Program, the main collaborators were: Madeline Cantwell, Garden & Outreach Coordinator; Christine James, Executive Director; Tom Hoerth, Orchardist/Raspberry Manager; Rick Harding, Farm Manager (who was replaced temporarily by Jeff Burchstead and then permanently by Amanda Jamison); Vivianne Holmes, Technical Advisor; Jeanne Cameron, Graphic Design Artist and Publicity Specialist; Christopher Rice, Garden Design Professional; Sue Sergeant, local flower grower; two temporary, summer employees of the Farm; an AmeriCorps N*CCC team on spike at The Morris Farm; and the 24 families who subscribed to the program.

Planning for the project was a collaboration primarily between Madeline, Christine, Tom, and Rick, with the assistance of Christopher Rice and Sue Sergeant in the particular planning of the flower-growing part of the program. Madeline and Christine created the over-all plan for the project and collaborated with Jeanne Cameron to create publicity materials.

The production plan and schedules for all crops were created by Rick, Tom, and Madeline. Rick was in charge of the egg and chicken production until he left, at which point those responsibilities were picked up by Jeff Burchstead and then by Amanda Jamison. As Raspberry Manager, Tom Hoerth coordinated the labor and production schedule for the raspberries. Labor in the raspberry patch included Tom, Christine, Esther & Nate (the summer employees) and the AmeriCorps team.

Both Sue Sergeant and Vivianne Holmes provided technical assistance and advice throughout the season. Sue's role was primarily to advise Madeline with the flower operation, while Vivianne advised in the grant administration, particularly with the surveying of participants at the end of the project and the compilation of relevant data to satisfy the stipulations of the grant. Members of the AmeriCorps team provided primarily labor for the raspberry patch and occasionally in the flower garden as part of their assignment at The Morris Farm.

Madeline was responsible for the flower operation and for general administration, troubleshooting, and management of the program.

5. The first stage of the project was the planning mentioned above. Based on the farm's production capacity for eggs and chickens in previous years and on the information available for the Kilarney raspberry variety, we determined how many subscriptions to each product the farm could carry, what the appropriate price should be for each subscription, and how each would be timed. The price scale was based on the costs of production for each crop, the standard prices for those crops in our particular regions, and incorporation of the pricing principles behind the CSA model of subscription agriculture, meaning primarily that subscribers were given a price break in exchange for advance payment. (Please see enclosed

copy of publicity brochure for details.) Planning for the flower operation included variety selection (with help specifically from Sue Sergeant), design of the new cutting garden (with help from Christopher Rice), and creation of a rough schedule of which varieties would be blooming when. The final step in the planning process was to set up pick-up days and times for the subscriptions that fit in with both with the farm's schedule and the chickens' schedule.

When these predictions were determined, we began publicizing through The Morris Farm's quarterly newsletter (which has a readership of roughly 900), local newspaper articles, a direct mailing of roughly 85 program fliers, and on the Farm's website. The program was also promoted to attendees of Morris Farm special events and educational programs. The total number of subscriptions sold were five egg, nine broiler chicken, seven flower, and twenty-two raspberry.

Production labor began immediately thereafter. The egg subscription was the first to begin, since our flock's production began to come out of its winter lull as soon as the weather became consistently warmer. The first batch of chicks for the broiler chicken subscription arrived in April. Flower production began in early Spring in the greenhouse by starting both annuals and perennials from seed, dividing perennials, renovating the Farm's existing flower beds and creating new beds. The raspberry patch was pruned, mulched, and fertilized according to its regular annual maintenance plan.

The first real challenge in the program was establishing a routine for pick-up. At the beginning of the pick-up season the construction of our new farmstand was not complete as we had originally anticipated. This created some confusion later on in the program, because for the first few pick-ups subscribers were asked to come to the office, rather than to the farmstand, which was a much more convenient pick-up location for the staff, though perhaps very slightly less convenient for the subscribers.

All of the subscriptions except for the eggs had to start later in the season than planned because of the unusually cold, wet Spring. The flower subscription started one week late, and

we ended up buying one batch of mature broiler hens (from The Last Stop in Warren, Maine, the farm that dresses chickens for The Morris Farm and uses a similar pastured poultry system and antibiotic-free feed) to start off the chicken subscription. Also as a result of the poor weather, the chickens throughout the season were of smaller size than we had hoped to be supplying to subscribers, though feedback about their flavor and over-all quality was consistently good.

Once the flower season got rolling it was relatively successful. The cool weather was excellent for calendula and some of the early perennials, such as shasta daisies and lupines. Other varieties that proved excellent for cutting were iris, scabiosa, nigella, foxglove, purple cone-flower, lamb's ear, dianthus, sunflower, zinnia, delphinium, iris, cornflower, yarrow, cosmos, phlox, and various rudbeckias. The varieties that I grew but did not end up using for cutting were lavatera, which had branching stems not conducive to arrangements; salvia strata, which was too short and kind of anemic in general; cleome, which I did not expect to have thorns; larkspur and lobelia, neither of which germinated; and poppies, which I did not really plan to use for cutting but planted anyway. Bachelor buttons provided an excellent filler and looked beautiful swaying in the breeze, but were extremely labor-intensive. I also started additional perennials for use in subsequent seasons, including columbine, wild bergamot, a couple of different kinds of echinacea, and monarda. In general, having the flowers mixed in with the vegetable garden added a great deal to the farm's aesthetic and captured the fancy of many of the farm's visitors.

The raspberries, which we expected to come into full production around July 4th, did not come into production until mid July, and instead of the bumper crop we expected to overwhelm us for six weeks, they came in a slow trickle for just barely eight. Though there is no way to know for certain, it is my conclusion that the discrepancy between our projected raspberry production and the number of pints actually picked was a result both of the incredibly bad weather and of either a miscalculation or overly-optimistic math. It is also my semi-educated guess that the specific way in which the weather affected the crop was the consistent rain during pollination season that kept a good number of pollinators under cover.

Another factor (which is *not* an educated guess but rather a whimsical observation—only worth mentioning because it is interesting, not necessarily even close to accurate) could have been that since the growing season in general was a couple of weeks behind, the raspberry fruiting period may have intersected with migratory flocks of birds, which appeared to be a problem only in the last week or ten days of picking.

Had the raspberry production been closer to the projections we made based on the variety and the age and health of the patch, the problems with the subscription pick-up routine and with people forgetting their pick-up day and time would not have been so dire. Certainly in any case we would not want a single pint of such an expensive crop to go to waste; however, if production had been higher and we were selling the extra pints daily to the local grocery store in addition to the subscription program, which we had planned to do during peak production weeks, we would have had more flexibility to move each pint when it was freshest and make up for subscribers' confusion through juggling and rearranging the marketing schedule. We also learned about two weeks into the picking season that the best way to store raspberries is not to cover them immediately with cellophane as we had been told, but to let them dry first in the cooler before covering them.

The raspberry production was so low, in fact, that after the second week of the subscription we had to split the subscribers into two groups for pick-up, one on Tuesday and one on Friday, instead of the original Wednesday pick-up plan. Although this eased some of the strain inevitable with a crop that is as perishable as raspberries, it at least doubled the *administrative* burden of the program. In creating the plan for the program in the early Spring, we drew from some of the same reasoning used by CSA farmers, which is the advantage gained by substituting the majority of the time and energy spent marketing, packing, delivering, etc. during the course of the week with a block of hours once a week that subscribers come to pick up their share. The intention in the plan for the Bird, Blossom & Berry program was that my Wednesday afternoons would be reserved for community-building interaction with the subscribers when they came to pick-up their shares. In this system, the rest of my time would be freely spent on the multiple, unpredictable demands of

the garden and general administration of the subscription program and other outreach programs; thus the Wednesday afternoon block would be a small sacrifice and a good opportunity to create and nurture relationships with the subscribers. However, with the change in the pick-up schedule, it was necessary for me to be available for at least two hours, usually more, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons for pick-up of the various subscriptions. This unfortunate but necessary arrangement was compounded by the confusion and/or forgetfulness of the subscribers, some of whom inevitably showed up on Mondays and Thursdays, and occasionally on Saturdays and Sundays as well. The amount of time circumscribed by the pick-up schedule and its additional management quickly outweighed the economic benefits of the program (see question 8 for further discussion) and far reduced the amount of attention I was able to give to maintenance of the garden and to other farm programs.

Although I was not able to reach all participants in the program by phone at the end of the subscription season, surveys were done by phone with 17 of the 24 families who subscribed (please see question 6 for survey results).

It was my conclusion the subscribers could not be assigned culpability for their forgetfulness, tempting though it was to do so. Firstly, the original schedule printed in the brochure through which they signed up bore only slight resemblance to the final schedule for the raspberries and differed at least slightly for the other subscriptions, especially for the people who bought subscriptions for raspberries and other crops. **Secondly, and perhaps the most important finding in this program, it is my feeling that in this period of fast-food convenience and seasonless, supermarket eating, it is quite possibly simply too much to ask modern consumers to make a special trip at a specific time for only one, two, or three specific items, and that the more traditional CSA model of large shares that include everything that is in season at a farm is more reliable, more satisfying for members, and of much greater economic benefit.** Furthermore, as one of the participants very shrewdly pointed out to me during his end survey, with or without the recent rise in fuel prices, it does not necessarily make environmental sense for consumers to drive out of their way to a farm to

pick up just a couple of food items (as opposed to a week's worth of produce) in an area that has no public transportation.

6. In measurement of the program's success according to its original goals, I have compiled the following information from surveys of the participants; surveys were completed for 17 of the 24 participants before the elimination of the Garden & Outreach Coordinator position. (Enclosed with the final report is a blank copy of the form used in the surveys.)

The primary reasons for participation in the program were to support The Morris Farm (16); to keep food dollars in the community (7); to attain organic or naturally-raised food & flowers (7); and price (1). Two participants listed all of the above reasons. Seven participants chose "other" as the reason for their participation, which included looking for something fun to do with their kids, not wanting to grow raspberries themselves, and wanting high-quality produce.

Prior to their enrollment in the Bird, Blossom & Berry program, 7 of the survey participants went out of their way to buy locally grown food as often as possible, 4 made some effort when convenient, 4 made a major effort, and 2 did not make any extra effort.

In response to my request to characterize their awareness of local food production on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least aware, 13 reported no change in their awareness, 3 reported a 2-point increase, and 1 reported a 1-point increase. However, when asked to give a verbal response in regard to the ways in which the program did or did not increase participants' awareness about local food production and its benefits and challenges, 12 reported that they were much more aware of the affect of the weather on food production, 2 reported an increase in awareness about specific crops that are available locally, 3 said that they became aware of the high quality of local food, and 6 reported that there was no change in their awareness. One participant reported an increase in knowlege about how food is produced.

Eleven of the 17 survey participants said they would definitely enroll in the program if it was offered again next year; 3 would not; 3 said they would consider enrolling again if some changes were made to improve the program.

When asked in what ways the program could be improved, participants suggested either more flexibility or stability in the pick-up schedule (10), an email reminder list (1), making more produce available for sale either through subscription or in the farmstand (7), offering poultry year round (1), and pulling some strings for better weather (3).

Three of the survey participants said that the program was not less convenient than the average trip to the grocery store. Of those for whom it was less convenient to some degree, 12 said there were aspects of their involvement that compensated for that inconvenience. Those aspects included quality, friendliness of staff, ideological commitment, support of The Morris Farm, access to organic/naturally-raised food, opportunities to visit the farm, and reconnecting with or learning about the realities of farming. Two participants found it very inconvenient.

My combined analysis of the survey data and of my own experience as primary administrator of the grant has led me to the following conclusions about our accomplishment of the original program goals.

The program did encourage local, seasonal eating for the 24 participating households and reminded those who participated and also those who were reached by the publicity materials but chose not to participate of the local availability of some staple foods. The program did provide a reasonable but very small-scale alternative to the chemical-intensive, foreign-grown flower industry.

The program very much achieved the goal of educating participants about the challenges of small-scale, organic farming. It also was a useful investigation of the viability of one kind of subscription marketing of fresh food as an alternative marketing strategy in midcoast Maine

and was successful in identifying some of the more dire risks involved, such as the weather. (Please see questions 5, 8 and 9 for a more full analysis of my findings, accomplishments, and unexpected results.) We did not achieve our goal of multiplying the effect of what was learned in the program due to the elimination of the Garden & Outreach Coordinator position.

7. As aforementioned, the weather in the 2000 growing season had an enormous effect on the Bird, Blossom & Berry program, particularly with the raspberries.

The other major way in which the specific circumstances of The Morris Farm affected the project was in the pre-existing commitment to the educational mission of the farm that some of the participants brought to the program. In the end surveys, 16 of the 17 people surveyed listed "to support The Morris Farm [and its mission]" as one of their primary reasons for joining the program, and 5 of those 16 listed it as their *only* reason for joining the program. I feel it is important to include these numbers in order to highlight the program participants who *came into* the program with goodwill and the intention of supporting the farm's overall mission. As a result of this pre-existing philosophical support, The Morris Farm may have more flexibility with experimental program results than a more traditional, non-educational farm. This, however, was one of the reasons that the farm undertook the responsibility of the grant as part of its greater responsibility to support and advocate for other, family-scale farms.

8. As mentioned in the answer to question 5, the Bird, Blossom & Berry program did not pull its own weight economically during the 2000 growing season at The Morris Farm. Although this does not by any means rule out the viability of a similar project for another small farm, in this particular context the administrative burden of the program far outweighed the economic benefit of the subscription model. Having the money at the beginning of the season was indeed helpful, but because the number of staff hours that went toward the project for the rest of the season exceeded the capital generated by subscriptions to single items (again, as opposed to a week's worth of produce), the program was not an economic success for The Morris Farm.

9. **My strongest impression from the program was that the success of the traditional CSA model is not arbitrary or coincidental but is rather a result of satisfying a community's actual need for and commitment to for fresh, local, affordable, organic, common-sense food.** Furthermore, the concept of subscription marketing cannot be transposed onto another model successfully if it does not service the community's need and commitment. As mentioned above, although having the start-up capital is helpful to the farmer, it does not necessarily make sense either environmentally, ideologically or practically for consumers to enter into that kind of relationship with a farm for only one or two food items.

There are, however, a couple of options for The Morris Farm in particular that might make the program more viable (one subscriber suggested in her survey that I have a heart-to-heart with Ma Nature to clear up the whole problem with the weather). Although the flower subscription was a reasonable success, it would certainly have been more successful if I, the grower, had been more experienced with flowers, particularly in cold climates. Another improvement would be to redesign both the flower and the berry subscriptions as pick-your-own operations, which would cut out both labor and administrative time, though it could potentially be problematic to track closely. For the raspberries, subscribers would have to be very conscientious about reporting where they had picked so the next pickers would know where not to look. For the flowers, subscribers would have to be educated about what stage is the best time to pick each variety and how many stems make up a reasonably-priced bouquet.

By far the most exciting prospect for the continuation of some version of the Bird, Blossom & Berry program at The Morris Farm is to combine subscriptions with enrollment in summer camp. I cannot envision how exactly it would work, especially for campers who are signed up for just one week instead of the full six weeks, but the combination would eliminate questions about the practicality of making a special trip for fresh, local produce and would certainly eliminate the problem of people forgetting to come pick up their subscriptions.

10. At this time I do not know if The Morris Farm will continue the Bird, Blossom & Berry program or some version thereof at any point in the future.

11. Please see the second paragraph of question 5 for details of the initial outreach for the program. It was not possible to complete the final outreach outlined in the grant proposal because of the elimination of the Garden & Outreach Coordinator position.

12. Respectfully submitted on April 26, 2001 by Madeline Cantwell,
former Garden & Outreach Coordinator
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(207) 882.4243
mbishop@gwi.net



Bird, Blossom & Berry
Exit Surveys; September, 2000

.....calling because the Bird, Blossom & Berry Subscription Program was partially grant-funded as a pilot project for the Morris Farm and other family-scale farms in our area. To best fulfill the grant, I need to ask the participants a few questions about the program and compile the information for our final report....take about 15 minutes.....is now a good time?

What was your primary reason for enrolling in the program?

- a. to support the Morris Farm
- b. to keep your food dollars in the community
- c. to attain organic or naturally-raised food/flowers
- d. price
- e. other--

Before you enrolled in the BBB program, did you go out of your way to buy locally produced foods? and to what extent?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the least aware, please characterize your awareness of local food production

a. before BBB

b. after BBB

In what ways (or can you give an example) of how participating in the program increased your awareness about local food production. (Either its benefits or challenges....)

Would you enroll next year if the program was offered again? Why/Why not?

In what ways could the program be improved or made more convenient?

If you found the program less convenient than your average trip to the grocery store, are there aspects of your involvement that compensated for that inconvenience?

Any other comments?

THANK YOU!!

What is the Bird, Blossom & Berry Subscription Program?

Subscription marketing is a progressive approach to both farming and food-buying. It offers multiple benefits to both consumer and food producers.

First and foremost, a subscription offers convenience. After paying once at the beginning of the season, you just come to the farm to pick up your order, which is packed and ready to go with your name on it.

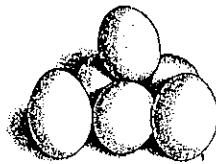
It's also a great way to support your local farmer with operating capital at the beginning of the season, when s/he needs it most!

The Bird, Blossom & Berry Program is an opportunity for you to pre-order perishable goods from The Morris Farm. You pay up front at the beginning of the season, then just come and pick up your order once a week (once every two weeks for broiler chickens.) In addition to fresh, local food, each subscription will include recipes, nutritional information, and meditations on the joy of food.

- Quick & Convenient
- Guaranteed availability
- Supports local farmers
- Keeps food dollars in the community

Going on Vacation?

You can transfer your subscription to a friend, or let us know in advance and The Farm will automatically donate that week's subscription to one of the local food banks.



BIRDS

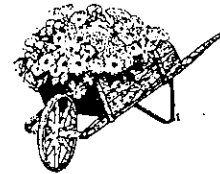
Farm Fresh Eggs*

One Dozen Eggs/week
 18 Weeks (May 31 – September 27)
 Price: \$35.00
 Pickup Day & Time: Wednesdays 4-6 p.m.
 *Eggs from The Morris Farm and Straw's Farm

Pasture-Raised Broiler Chickens
 One Fresh Chicken every two weeks
 14 Weeks (late June to late September)
 Price and dates to be confirmed in May

BLOSSOMS

Organically Grown
 Cut Flowers



One Bunch/week
 12 Weeks (June 14 – August 30)
 Price: \$42.00
 Pickup Day & Time: Wednesdays 4-6 p.m.



BERRIES

Organic Red
 Raspberries

One Quart/week
 6 Weeks (July 5 – August 15)
 Price: \$35.00
 Pickup Day & Time: Wednesdays 4-6 p.m.

* Please note that the dates for each subscription may vary slightly according to the weather.

BIRD, BLOSSOM & BERRY SUBSCRIPTION PROGRAM

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Please check the box(es) of the subscription you would like to order:
 (Multiple subscriptions are o.k.)

| SUBSCRIPTION | # OF SUBS. | PRICE |
|--|------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EGGS | _____ | \$ _____ |
| 1 doz./week for 18 weeks | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BROILER CHICKEN | _____ | \$ _____ |
| 1 every 2 weeks for 14 weeks | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FLOWERS | _____ | \$ _____ |
| 1 bunch/week for 12 weeks | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> RASPBERRIES | _____ | \$ _____ |
| 1 quart/week for 6 weeks | | |
| TOTAL | | \$ _____ |

Deadline for Subscription is May 15

Please make your check payable to:

The Morris Farm Trust

Clip this form and mail to:

The Morris Farm

P.O. Box 136

Wiscasset, ME 04578

You will receive more information and confirmation of your subscription by mail.



The Morris Farm is a nonprofit environmental education center and organic farm held in public

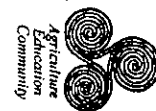
trust. The three themes of the farm are agriculture, education, and community. The farm's 50+ acres are home to a farm family, a small herd of Jersey cows, two Percheron work horses, a flock of Jacob sheep, laying hens, rabbits, and a very popular pig! The Morris Farm is open to the community from dawn til dusk 7 days a week. We welcome people to come and freely roam our pastures, gardens, raspberry patch, apple orchard, forest nature trail, and to gaze at the pond and waterfall. The Morris Farm also hosts community events and workshops, and runs a very successful school field trip program and summer day camp.

The farm is located on Route 27, 1/2 mile north of the intersection with coastal Route 1 in Wiscasset.

For more information, call
207-882-4080

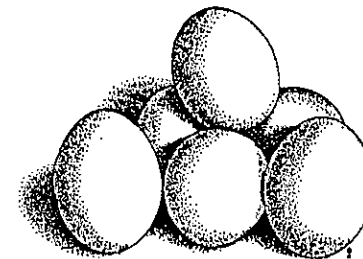


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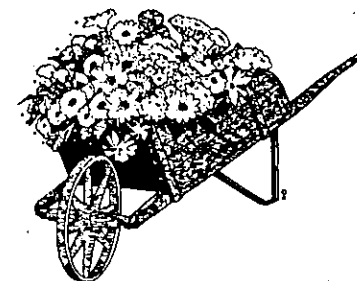


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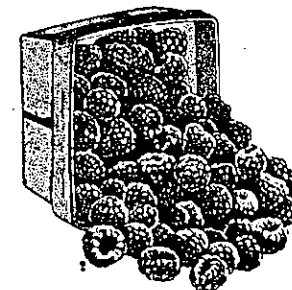
BIRD



BLOSSOM



& BERRY



SUBSCRIPTION PROGRAM

The Morris Farm Trust
Gardiner Road
Wiscasset, Maine

SPRING/SUMMER 2000