

## Scaling Up for Wholesale

All right, well, we can get started.

I'm sure people will continue to join, but they can hop in as they do

so welcome, everybody. This is the scaling up for wholesale production workshop.

Based on a case study in cooperative crop planning.

So just some housekeeping things. Please rename yourself with your name, your organization, and if you'd like, you can put your pronouns.

And we will be recording the session, so contact us with any concerns about that.

Abbie, my colleague, is doing tech support, so give her a holler with my questions.

Also I'll be pretty hands-off as a facilitator, so feel free to shoot me questions, as well.

I will be facilitating the session. My name's Alex. I work with Sustainable Connections. And I will just start by introducing

the panel. So we've got project managers from the sustainable -- or

sorry. The specialty crop block grant that we've been working on. The project managing side is Jeff Voltz with northwest ago business her? And Cheryl Thornton with Cloud Mountain and Sustainable Connections

and we also have two participants in the program, so on the buyers side we have Brent

Chambers, from Haagen

and on the producer side we have Nick Spring of sprainingtime farm.

So we've got a presentation and then we'll have some time for panel discussion.

So yeah. With that said, I will just turn it right over to Jeff and Cheryl.

CHERYL: Thank you, Alex.

Thank you, everybody, for coming to this session.

I will start out by saying I'm Cheryl Thornton, Cloud Mountain Farm Center, and

we have been working on a specialty crop -- I can't -- it's tongue twisteru twister.

Specialty crop block grant regarding scaling up for wholesale, and working with pharmacy and buyers

farms and buyers. It's been quite a project. This is our third year we've been working on it.

We feel we've made a great deal of progress in terms of how to work together with buyers and growers

to facilitate scaling up and wholesale.

There's a couple different partners, as Alex mentioned. There's Sustainable Connections,

northwest ago business center, farm center, and I also wanna give a shout-out to the Puget Sound food hub

. Puget Sound food hub has been involved with the distribution of project in this grant.

So maybe Jeff, do you wanna introduce yourself and then we can start out?

You can share the slides?

JEFF: Sure. Hi, I'm Jeff Voltz, project manager of northwest ago business center, and we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that is trying to

improve the economic vitality of agriculture throughout the now -- it's either 10 or 12 counties that we serve.

And so this is actually -- the block grant is a federally funded grant that is administered by the Washington state Department of Agriculture

and it's a really similar very valuable grant program for trying to assist groups of farmers , they don't have

to be organized, it could be educational or whatever, but --

due to -- to expand markets. So it's really the thrust of the program.

So I'll turn it back over to Cheryl to --

CHERYL: Can you -- share your slide, Jeff?

JEFF: O ready to go. Let's do that.

CHERYL: We're ready to go.

JEFF: Share screen.

CHERYL: Okay. So as I mentioned, this is a project that is really working with buyers

and growers on scaling up for wholesale.

So we are looking at specialty crop. That is what the grant is. And specialty crops are generally anything.

They're pretty broad definition of what that is; what those crops are.

Not things like wheat, corn, those commodity-type products.

So the goal is again to increase sales into wholesale market channels for growers.

Go ahead, Jeff.

We wanted to really look at how can buyers and growers work together.

So the first year, the first couple years, what we've done is look at forming a cohort

with wholesale buyers, and that included a variety of whole SAIL buyers

so we had retail grocery and restaurants. We also had institutional food service, so Western Washington University

as well as the Bellingham school district.

So trying to get a broad sector of the wholesale buying capacity for what is out there.

Then we formed a cohort of growers, and some of the growers were already mid-size farms that were growing already for wholesale

, and some small farms that wanted to scale up.

So we tried again to do -- to come up with a mix of growers so that there were different sizes.

We did a survey, then, of farmers about what they sell most of, and what did they have

that they couldn't sell. What did they have an interest in working together.

And were they interested in working with wholesale buyers in market and crop planning with.

So we had various questions that we put together for different growers and what their interests were.

We did the same with buyers. What were they looking for? What are the buyers's expectations? What kind of products are they looking for

?

Out of that we identified ten key crops for growing -- for the growing and buying season for 2020

there's so many different crops out there, and we kind of got lost a little bit in terms of

getting a lot of what we can do this and grow that and so we had to really winnow it down

to ten, to just start out with, so we had some consistency between year to year.

All right. I'm gonna turn it over to Jeff.

JEFF: And that survey I think was all Skagit and Whatcom County farms and I think

there's 138 surveys sent out, and we had a response about 60 or so.

So we were able to ascertain through those crops -- those ten that we selected were agreed upon between the buyers

and the farmers in some meetings in we facilitated.

But we're -- based on what the farmers in this region thought they could grow the best and deliver the best

, you know, in terms of quality of product.

And so that's what we focused on.

So then we created forms for the buyers and the farmers to fill out

about how many of these different kinds of crops in terms of cases would they want

-- would they project possibly being able to commit to holding through this program

, this organized program that we're facilitating.

And by month. So it's very simple, rudimentary process of collecting this data and then being able to

transfer it into one large workbook with everybody's data on it to be able to start to

create a plan.

And you'll notice that the pack in the column there, these are all pretty much standard case packs

or agreed-upon case packs by the farmers and the buyers. Sometimes there's a little deviation. But those are

what they determined.

And this is just one set going on beyond the lettuce down there at the bottom, there was also a salad greens

braising mix, cherry tomatoes, slicing cucumbers, zucchini, and the two types

of winter squash were also part of the mix.

And so we gave the same forms to the farmers -- the buyers are all in cases.

We had the farmers do it in actual pounds or eachs for those months. So the farmers filled out their form

with how -- [indiscernible] what kind of crops they would have in terms of total pound for each of those months so when they would begin

and when they would end.

And I found out some pretty interesting things in formulating the plan for 2021.

This is what we were doing for 2020.

And so it's been really a process of going through something and learning what could happen.

And you'll notice

I did a whole January year, because sometimes we have very innovative farmers

so for instance we have farmers who have cauliflower available in March. So it's going through that process

and winnowing down what -- people might have and when that you had like to sell it.

So this is kind of a final, so based on this 2020 season everybody was participating.

You'll notice in the left-hand column we've got public school district, two restaurants a grocery retailer, produce department, a grocery retailer deli department, and a University were all participating.

So this is the cases or the meat of this table are what everybody said they could possibly project purchasing through this program.

And obviously there are some much larger numbers there than what the farmers participating could supply. But we wanted to go through and say okay what do they want and what our farmers have.

So if you look down there towards the bottom of the table, you see combined farmers projections, that's the amount of

eachs or pounds that our farmers predict in having.

So from that we started to mold out crop plans.

And so the variance, 125/370 -- case variance would possibly be considered an opportunity. Yeah.

So Cheryl.

CHERYL: So pricing is always one of those things that most of us try to avoid, that conversation. It can be great or it can be difficult.

So we really wanted to focus on transparency and agreeing on price ahead of time.

So that nobody got caught in the middle of the season not knowing what to expect.

So we wanted to really look at the long-term success of this.

And with that said, communication -- clear communication with us important.

We all know that all of us farmers are rich and we can afford to sell product wherever we can at whatever price,

which is not the case at all. And the same way, buyers cannot afford to

pay us what we think we should get, and they have their margins, as well.

So we really wanted to make sure that we were all on the same page that we came up with an agreement

that worked for everybody.

We wanted to solve this problem, like I said, ahead of time, with coming up with what the product is, what kind of packing size it is, what the expectations are the timing, and then if there were issues along the way, how did we work that out in terms of quantity, quality, so on, if there were disruptions in the summer months.

Jeff?

JEFF: So there is -- we sent out a blank one of these for everybody to fill out, and all the wholesale buyers and all the farmers got the same exact copy to fill out.

And it was based on case prices for all those products.

And so each independent individual filled it out and September 'em in, and I compiled 'em you will.

Would have liked to have had more participation than we got, but we had reasonable participation.

And my process for doing this was to try to identify where prices might be the closest

and say okay, well, looks like we have at least some opportunity of getting in half of the categories that we have or

whatever that might be, so we know that we can at least move forward with some kind of plan.

And then seemed to me as though farmers were able to circle back kind of almost postplan and -- get to yes with buyers a little bit later on.

Of course understand -- I guess it'll be a part of another slide.

But we finished this in April of two thousand and n- -- no in 2020. Just --

six to eight weeks after the whole COVID pandemic hit.

So -- the planning process was quite interesting and quite late.

This year we have gotten to the point of having the plan accomplished by the first week of February so we've made a big improvement this year.

So that's kind of the gist of it.

I don't think we have totally discovered the way to conduct transparent pricing.

Cheryl, you wanna thought about briefly? We decided to just recommend

that individual farms and buyers call each other and they all have seen what everybody had for pricing?

And try to work something out. And I think that's -- pretty much where we left it.

Not sure that's where it oughta be, but maybe -- maybe it is where it needs to be, because -- there are different margins are needed in

different categories of product. In other words, a grocery wholesale catalog is usually gonna have a little

less expensive prices than a food-service wholesale catalog.

And farmers who have been selling farmers markets understand between selling to a retail grocery store or restaurant that there's a little more

flexibility from the restaurant side.

So we're still trying to have those conversations.

I think that's one of the important things to think about, this isn't -- it's a very rudimentary

system we're still trying to figure out how to work together to create some system,

and we know in the future this is gonna be automated in some nature, and there's probably software already to do stuff like this

but the importance is these relationships happening and working on these issues together to understand that

the farmers need a place at the table to be able to continue to sustain farming

and trying to get the price that's right for the farms is really critical.

We're very fortunate we have wholesale buyers who are sensitive to that and actually

care about local food and wanna make things happen.

CHERYL: I think that we'll have a moment to both Nick Spring and Brent from Haagen can talk about that in a few minutes.

JEFF: This is what a finished plan looked like for restaurant number one.

So if you see -- and I can't see all the way totally on my right-hand column, but I think it's 17150 cases for the season

(1710 cases) and it was 400 pounds of product.

And there's a good mix I think four of the five participating farms sold through to that restaurant. So it was a good mix for all the farms

and the restaurant itself.

So this is the plan for restaurants.

Wanna get folks actually what was provided to the executive chef of that restaurant and to

the farms who were participating in it. In that plan.

Cheryl.

CHERYL: So another part of the grant was that we were -- wanted to work with growers

in terms of current practices, to come up with an idea of what growers are doing,

and is there a way that their practices can -- the best practices can be shared with other growers so that they can scale up.

For wholesale buyers.

So we did -- Tom did -- from Cloud Mountain, did a photographic and written compilation of different crops

of these ten different crops, and what people were doing, and are they -- having problems? What works? What doesn't work?

That document will be changing. It's something that is in -- can be updated annually

, every year, looking at different things, new things that come out that growers do that works better.

So that will be part of the end of this grant, at the end of this year.

Again, a living document. Something that growers can add to, subtract from, and share with each other.

We feel that part of this grant was not only in crop planning and working with buyers, but

growing practices and working together to help each other so that everybody can get a head's up and more

information on what other people are doing.

JEFF: So this is what happened in 2020 as of the end of November.

I was getting ready for the next meeting of our buyer and farmer cohort for December meeting, and so that's as far as I got

and I haven't gotten through the year end yet.

So we obviously have big plans, 6,523 and we ended up with 970 cases out of plan.

So -- and a big part of that COVID hit and we lost a lot of people that --

participants from the wholesale side or large ones that knocked us back a few pegs.

But interestingly enough, these relationships created new sales and the new sales vastly competed

the plan sales, and we think that's gonna turn around this year [indiscernible] the plan we have.

But still overall mighty effort of trying to get somewhere and get something recorded, we are thankful that

we are -- all the wholesale buyers and the farmers eater are members or participate in -- buy from the Puget Sound food hub, so we have real data available to collect this data and measure and see how we're doing.

And so that's really good thing.

So the five participating farms each had 17,228 in revenue for the year. So not a huge return, but still an admirable first start. We think it's gonna vastly improve for this upcoming season.

So with that I'll -- lemme see here.

CHERYL: So --

JEFF: We're at the point of introducing Brent --

CHERYL: Yeah. One quick thing before I do that is to kinda reiterate what Jeff said , and that is that the Puget Sound food hub also stepped up and became part of the team in terms of looking at margins and how we could best move this product to

the buyers. It's difficult for growers to do that on their own, so we worked with the huge sound food hub on that.

So first off, I'll introduce Nick Spring, Springtime Farm, and Nick was part of the original cohort and is still part of the cohort

for 2021.

So Nick, wondering if you can speak a little bit about -- what this grant did, how it helped, what were some of the challenges, and what you're seeing for 2021 as a grower.

NICK: Okay. Well, thank you so much for giving me the space to speak.

As Cheryl said, I'm Nick spraining with Springtime Farm, co-owner with my wife.

We're up in Everson.

This year we're growing about ten acres of mixed veggies and flowers.

It's our eighth season, and this is our second year participating in the program.

And I guess for the most part it was it was extremely valuable just for the access to introductions for wholesale buyers. It was kinda like a online dating service.

Once you're in the room, it's easier to have that conversation.

We've traditionally be about 50% direct market and 50% wholesale business, and finding those wholesale outlets has been difficult, cold calls to restaurants and grocery stores usually don't work out, in my experience.

And so just getting in the room and having that introduction I feel like was the biggest benefit of this grant for us.

Also the collaboration with some of the other farmers on best practices.

So yeah.

CHERYL: What are you looking forward to for this next year based upon what happened in 2020?

Any thoughts on that?

NICK: Yeah, I think it's just gonna continue to improve.

We started developing some relationships with some of the buyers in the cohort, and I'm liking the approach this year where it was basically we had an introduction and then Jeff has left it up to us to communicate further details.

And I think it's gonna lead to increased sales for all of us.

And yeah, just gonna be kind of a matter of keeping everyone happy, keeping the consistency and quality there, and growing from here on out.

So -- yeah, we have a couple buyers from last year that we're continuing to work with that were new buyers for us,

and then this year we're hoping to add to that list. So.

Haven't sold anything yet, but --

CHERYL: What -- what are some of the challenges that you saw last year and are there any challenges that you see for this coming year?

NICK: Well, I guess, yeah, it is a relationship, and so that communication was prob'ly the most difficult part.

Some things didn't work out on our end, and then having to communicate that to the buyer and vice versa

sometimes some of the buyers, we had planned crops that then were not needed.

And so kinda back tracking.

So just keeping that communication open is -- as all the folks here in this Zoom call know, yeah, you just have to work with your buyers and -- figure that relationship out,

'cause things are always changing.

But yeah, I'm excited. I think there's a lotta growth potential. We're just really hitting the tip of the iceberg

in terms of local food and what we can produce here and what is consumed locally. So -- I think it's gonna be good.

CHERYL: Great. Thanks, Nick.

So we also have Brent Chambers from Haagen, who was part of the cohort last year as a buyer.

So Brent, I'll have you answer the same kinda questions that Nick did from the buyer perspective.

BRENT: You bet.

So I think being part of the program was helpful for me in understanding what goes into the planning part of

a grower. Right?

For me, being on the retail side, I'm looking two to eight weeks out and not having to think months down the road.

Which is what all the growers are having to do.

So learning that aspect of the business was helpful for me, and learning to communicate with the growers

on what my wants and needs are for the year and coming up with a plan on how they can support or we can support each other and kinda moving forward.

Going through the whole planning process of quantities and those kinda things and coming with the items

from -- was nice to be able to meet a bigger range of growers than what I have in the past.

I've been in the produce retail side for it's 30 years this year, so -- crazy.

But, you know, always had a group of small farmers that we've dealt with here at Haagen,

but being able to make this a bigger group and expand on that is exciting to me from the retail part of it.

So that part was really good.

CHERYL: What was your perspective, Brent, on the quality of product coming from local growers and your expectations?

Were they met?

BRENT: Yeah, I think overall the quality was fantastic. Exactly what we're looking for.

Every once in a while you do have hiccups, but that all comes in communication and just reaffirming what my spec.

needs are from the retail side of it. Restaurants and retail specs are -- can be a little bit different.

So I think that's a -- not necessarily a challenge, but it's just a different between the two businesses.

But overall the quality was awesome. Quality's what sells, and that's totally what I'm looking for, so --

CHERYL: How about what Nick was talking about, which is the -- one of the key points of communication? How did that work for you last year? With growers.

BRENT: Sure. I think COVID really threw a wrench in everything last year.

Even with this program. Right? Because there was so many -- we were scrambling for months and months

and months when COVID hit in the grocery industry.

So I know my communication was poor. So I will definitely own that last year.

It got better throughout the year, just because the flow of products back to the stores was better and they have more time.

But communication's key. If we're not continually communicating when crops are gonna be ready, if they're having a good season, if they're gonna have an abundance of crop, you know, all that is very important just for both sides to keep good communication on.

So very important.

CHERYL: I wanted to ask, actually, both of you: Pricing. We'll go back to the pricing question here. How did that work, Brent, for you last year and working with some of the growers?

BRENT: Sure. You know, I think pricing is one of those not everybody wants to talk about it; right? 'Cause we all have our needs on both sides of it; right?

Grocery store margins are different than what restaurant margins are and we have to be able to hit our targets. We're hold from above to hit certain numbers.

But with that said, I will pay more for a great quality of local item than I would from the warehouse.

So just for a couple reasons. One, to support local, because I think that's very important.

And then two, it's just -- it's the right thing to do. It really is. I think local is where we need to be, and I think that's a big part of my business plan.

But the negotiation part is always a little bit difficult.

So generally in my experience, we're both having to give in a little bit on both sides to make it work.

And then I will actually have to charge more for something else down in the rest of my business to make up for the difference.

CHERYL: Nick, how 'bout from your end? How did that work for you?

NICK: Well, I mean, I guess -- it's been a learning curve for us here at the farm.

We're still fairly new to the game, and we're small growers, so, you know

maybe we produced 15,000 cases a year, and then

to get into that wholesale level, where -- yeah, some -- you know.

Just to be selling through the food hub, we're looking at a 20 to 25% markup, and then

so it's -- yeah, there was a bit of a negotiation there, and it's -- it can be kind of a sticker shock

for some of us growing under, you know, ten acres or small -- you know, small scale, where

the idea is oh, yeah, we

wanna grow more and sell more, but when we come to that reality of

you know, we're looking at selling a case of beets for 16 bucks,

that's -- it can be hard to swallow.

But we made it work, and I don't know. I'm happy with the results.

I think it starts small and we'll be able to move more cases as these relationships develop.

Yeah. It's kind of the name of the game.

And also just learning how to scale our efficiencies so we can make those prices

more efficient at our scale.

So I think it's a win-win, even though it's hard to recognize that at first sometimes.

CHERYL: That's for sure.

Brent, what challenges do you see ahead for 2021? Working with local growers here in this area?

BRENT: You know, just keeping up with communications is prob'ly gonna be the main challenge.

I'm giving them goals of -- our commitment what I will buy, and there are so many factors in growing

with weather and whatnot that can push back what I need or change what -- the outcome of what the crop is.

So it's definitely communication.

And for me, on the other end of it, it's -- just seeing what COVID's gonna do as far as the shoppers' habits.

So COVID hit, guests are shopping less often, they're buying more, we've seen a trend to more packaging items, but I really don't wanna push packaged. I wanna push fresh bulk.

And then just gettin' how do I as the retailer get the message out of: I'm buying from all these local farms,

and get that to the consumer, so they understand to support local and it's a big deal on both ends.

CHERYL: One last question before we move on, because it has come up in the -- in our discussions these last couple years,

and that is packaging. Packaging playing a part into what a grower needs to do to sell.

So Nick, I'm wondering from you what your perspective is and was on packaging changes that you had to make

and what impact that had on you as a farm.

NICK: Well, I mean, so we -- as we started our farm, we were constantly just reusing boxes trying to take any shortcuts we could on packaging.

But the reality is, yeah, dealing with wholesalers, distributors, yeah, we need clean, safe packaging and it needs to look good. I mean, you're selling a product. Whether it's just going to the back of a produce department, it needs to look good for them, and. . . .

Yeah, it's just part of doing business.

So -- yeah, I mean, to -- yeah, couple years ago we weren't buying pallets of new boxes, but we are now, and

that's just part of it. So.

CHERYL: And Brent, on your end, are you seeing challenges with packaging coming from local growers for what you need for

Haagen?

BRENT: Yeah, I think that's part of our communication earlier on, is my expectations of the type of packaging I'm looking for.

'Cause again, with consumer trends, more recyclable packaging is really what we're looking for.

Besides being sustainable and recyclable, it needs to be pleasant looking.

So I -- you know, I [indiscernible] really help sell things, like cherry tomatoes, we push a lot of organic cherry

tomatoes in an open-top cardboard container.

Since we've switched that type of container, our sales have probably overdoubled.

So you really have to find the right packaging that the consumers are looking for that they'll support.

CHERYL: Thank you.

Jeff, do you wanna continue on?

JEFF: Okay.

CHERYL: I wanna leave time for questions, too. Since we have both Brent and Nick here.

JEFF: Back to -- share screen. I think [indiscernible].

JEFF: Hmm. Musta closed down here. So let's --

CHERYL: We can see it. There we go. Oop.

You could go down some slides here.

JEFF: I think we're in the thoughts and conclusions.

CHERYL: There we are.

JEFF: Oh, and --

CHERYL: Go ahead.

JEFF: Okay. So -- that's what happened so far in 2020.

Yeah. So I think are you doing thoughts -- yeah, thoughts and conclusions and I'm doing the last two?

CHERYL: Sure. You bet.

So some -- as you can see, hopefully, between Nick and Brent that positive relationships were established, and

again, that's the goal of how do you approach creating those relationships.

And the goal of the grant was to help facilitate that.

And as I think Nick pointed out, often being in the room is like 95% of it.

If you don't know who those buyers are, cold calling or trying to come up with who to contact can be a huge issue.

And in the middle of trying to be crop planning and growing and so on, that is always just a difficult time sync

in terms of trying to find out who and what.

We tried to develop some systems to support collaborative market and crop planning, as what Jeff went through of what do buyers want? What can growers grow? What are those numbers like?

You put 'em all together, what are the deficiencies?

What's the pricing structure?

So trying to come up with a model that can work in the future for anybody.

And I know that the Puget Sound food hub is looking at potentially using this approach in the future for the members of the Puget Sound food hub

for crop planning what do growers have? What do buyers want? And then putting those together to help facilitate creating relationships,

which is the bottom line here.

The current sales as of November of 2020 was \$86,000,

and the projected sales through the year were 90,000. Jeff I think maybe has some updates on that.

And after one year, everybody's looking to scale up even more.

We did have some sales between buyers and growers that weren't expected. As part of this. So that was a good thing.

Some of those were: Oh, I didn't know you grew this. I will take that.

Or: I didn't know you were looking for that. I can grow this.

So those opportunityic sales are part of this whole positive outcome of what we've been trying to do.

Jeff?

JEFF: So -- so where are we going now is actually we met with a slightly expanded group of buyers, eight buyers and seven growers

, in early December. We've been planning for the 2021 season.

We did a little bit of debrief on the past season just about some things that weren't working, just to get some

brainstorming and ideas between everybody about things are going to change.

One of the things that changed was we determined that broccoli just was not gonna be a successful crop here

due to competitive pressures from cheap prices from California.

But seemed like berries were a highly desired item by the buyers.

So we blocked swapped the broccoli out for strawberries.

We provided worksheets like we did the previous year.

But great thing was that about I wanna say we had about 60 to 70% over -- people doing both the next season

so it went a lot smoother this year because we had people who were familiar with how we did things.

And we did the survey again.

And went through the same process that I just showed you.

And then we actually -- I sent a draft plan out.

And just a little bit about the plan is that right now it's

-- we'd hoped there would be more group process together, but it's been really difficult, especially with COVID,

although Zoom does work well, but a lot of it has been dependent on us as project managers to crunch numbers

and have conversations back and forth.

And then the allotment of the cases from the farms to the buyers is just me trying to put it together on something

that makes the most sense. And a lot of this is not written down.

We're actually trying to create what areas we think need to be improved upon.

I think the allocation and I'll be -- copious notes and hopefully be developing a finished product that will be

usable in terms of even the spreadsheets once this project is over.

So it -- I looked at in terms of how the allocation happened,

it would be who had -- if the buyer requested a certain farm, that obviously was gonna be honored.

If a buyer and a farmer had a relationship from the previous year, that was gonna be honored.

And then I strive to balance everybody -- and obviously farmers who had much more product were gonna sell more product

'cause they had much more product, especially if they were in a season like January/February/March carrots. There's a limited selection there, so they

ended up selling more units than somebody else.

But one of the things I think we did well last year and this year's plan is we made sure all the farmers were connecting with new buyers and new markets. So we really tried to make that mix really work.

So sometimes you'd have some of the crops might be shared between a couple farmers just so we're sure that everybody

-- we were mixing those relationships.

And I think that's really important, and really proved out last year in terms of extra sales that weren't in the plan.

And so here's the results from this year. So we've got -- trying to keep anonymity here. We've got seven farms.

And public school.

Couple -- retail supermarket, produce departments, private school food services. Food hub.

That goes retail.

Restaurant hospitality food services. Nonprofit food access. And university food service.

And so overall -- take a look there just in terms of what each of the different buyer types or how many cases into buying -- I can't see it because the bars are across that.

But total for this year is -- the plan is 8,000 -- little over 8,000 cases.

Range of farms there. I think from just a little over 500 to 2320.

When we talked about the mix of farms, we really wanted to have mid-scale farms who can attract larger buyers

and larger orders, and provide consistency of product and make the project attractive enough to get everybody in the room talking together.

And I think in that it paved the way for the small farmers to try to figure out how to fit in.

As you can see, we have some of the buyers are buying a lot of cases and some aren't.

So seems like there's a good fit for farms of all sizes who are emerging into wholesale in this model.

So. I know there's some questions in the chat box.

Is one of Sustainable Connections help he was gonna help us?

ALEX: Yeah, I can jump in. We have two questions that came up. One's real quick. If anybody does have questions feel free to

put 'em in the chat and we can get to as many as we can within the next 13 minutes or so.

The real quick one, and I actually know the answer to this, but for Cheryl, is the growing practices document available to the public? Is that finished yet?

CHERYL: That is not finished yet. Tom is still working on it, finishing up the last crops.

And so as soon as it's done, which should be done I believe by summer,

yes, that will become available to allegros.

Now, I'm not sure where. That's a very good question, where it's gonna live.

But it will live somewhere, and we can make sure to get the word out to everybody of where that document will live.

And again, it'll be interesting to see as growers have additions or comments on it how that will change.

And so we're excited to kind of see -- have it get in the hands of growers so that we can get feedback and

that document can be shared between each other.

JEFF: We all struggled with what kind of document it should be, because we researched how-toes and it's a one size fits all kind of model

, and we thought of a living document that farmers could get together working on crops could update.

So it's structured in a way there's components of it that can be updated.

I would assume that the Sustainable Connections and NABC will definitely have them on our websites.

But we'll figure out some outreach dissemination strategy to get the information out.

'Cause we're gonna have that, we're gonna have some kind of canned package for this

market crop planning thing, and my dream and belief is that it backgrounds a role within the food distribution cooperatives,

the staff role, to work with -- and that we created something that was electronic, some kind of inventory planning process type of thing

that starts to sort things in a way that we'd like to direct it and record information.

CHERYL: So yeah. I think it could live on NABC, Cloud Mountain Farm center, and Sustainable Connections websites, all three of 'em, potentially.

But we'll have to get the word out when that document's finished.

ALEX: Thanks.

The other question in the chat is: Were there any buyers who were looking for something specifically and none of the farmers were able

to grow or were currently growing? And if so, how did you address that?

JEFF: We have those extra sales, so obviously that wasn't part of the plan, so they connected at that level.

We did have that discussion in-between the -- in our cohort in December, when we were doing the plan for this year,

were there items that -- and a part of it was for this project we wanna be locked in to measuring these ten crops

we're working with.

And the gonemy packet is a part of the market for wholesale pact trying to make sure that we're developing

quality control, best practices, that would ensure we're giving the best products possible to the market in a collaborative way.

CHERYL: I'm wondering, we've got a buyer here, we've actually got two buyers here, but -- that I see.

Brent, any comments on that from your perspective? Just to help some of the growers that are in this session?

BRENT: Sure. As far as items that we're looking for that --

as something that we haven't really discussed, but we had a great hot house tomato grower, something like that

, always looking for something different/unique.

There's a lot of the farms grow many of the same items, but something that would stand out in the retail place

is what we're looking for.

But for me, anything hot House I know that's a bigger investment than what's out there for most farms out there, so

not always the most practical want out there.

But definitely there's a need for it, though. There's sales to be had.

ALEX: This is goin' off script a little bit, but Deaf von, if you're there, I'm gonna call you out and see if you've got a response to that question, as somebody

who's also on the wholesale buyers' market.

Devon might not be there. He might be away from his computer.

That's all the questions that we have in the chat that are specific to this group.

Let's see. So we've got another one coming up. That's really exciting case study.

What would help buyers and growers to continue strengthening these relationships and better understand

the unique challenges each face and continue to identify opportunities to achieve shared goals?

So that's a big question.

CHERYL: That's a question we've been asking for 40 years.

I don't know. I mean, I think that this is a step in terms of looking at

somewhat developing a system, a framework, so that growers and buyers

can talk to each other, can understand what each other want and need, and that this provides at least some type of

structure to that.

Often it's you're winging it and trying to scramble, and maybe this is a good way for

people to work together.

And it's often difficult, unless you have some type of structure set up, like the Puget Sound food hub,

where you have a cohort of growers and a system whereby somebody can help with the crop planning and what the buyers want.

So -- again, working together, working with some type of system using this kind of structure

to facilitate conversation would be what I would say.

Jeff, do you have --

JEFF: Yeah, I think it's structural. I think maintaining those relationships is

-- it takes facilitation. It takes some kind of system -- systemic/systematic way of getting together.

We obviously as a UFCA designated rural cooperative center, we think co-ops are a really good way to do this

, and we think that it's pretty exciting right now NABC is working with eight different

producer-owned co-ops representing 220 owner -- member owners, farmers owners, throughout a ten-county region

and we think there's a lot of opportunity for co-ops -- farmer-owned co-ops to have a real dominant place

in -- as being the source for local food.

That should be what we own and if the farmers owned the land and own the businesses and the farms and own the cooperative and have a stake in the distribution, that's one way to make it all happen.

CHERYL: Nick, do you have any thoughts on that? As a grower?

NICK: Yeah, I was just gonna -- it's kinda what I said earlier. I agree with everything you guys just said. It is so important to have that facilitation to get in the room, but then nothing is gonna take the place

of the direct relationship between the grower and the buyer.

You know, you can only grow a beet so well. From the outside.

And so whether you wanna buy my beets or someone else's, it's maybe 'cause we have that relationship.

and so yeah, that's why this grant has been important, is to get us in the room and start that conversation.

And then it's the hard work after the fact.

CHERYL: Brent, do you have any comments on that?

BRENT: Yeah, I think last year was -- with COVID it was a little more difficult,

but I think it's gonna be very important for me to get out to these farms and see what they're doing and see how they're growing

and build that one-one relationship, face to face. I think face to face relationships can really take things so much further

rather than on the phone or through Zoom or anything else.

I think the in-person, as COVID will allow us in the future to get back to normal, hopefully, and just build those relationships one-on-one and, I can see their challenges firsthand.

And then I can communicate my challenges to them face to face.

I think that will help build these relationships even further.

>>: I would like to speak up and say thank you to everybody, and I appreciate all the work that is being done behind the scenes.

And it was really nice, Nick, hearing you and reiterate some of the problems that small farmers have.

I'm very small farmer.

And I would just like to make a plug for the -- we talked about packaging and labeling. And on the front end

is quite unbelievable the amount of packaging that we need.

But on the back end, when all that packaging is discarded, it's also very unbelievable, where it goes

and how it's being taken care of, and that's kind of another end of this whole process that

I think needs to be addressed.

So thank you very much. This was amazingly informative.

ALEX: Yeah, well, we're just about at time. Thanks, Helen, and thanks to Cheryl and Jeff and Nick and Brent

for being on the panel. Thanks to everybody for your questions.

We're gonna take a short break, so you can refill your drink, take a little stretch, take care of any biological needs you have, we'll be back at 1996