

CROPP (Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool)

Cooperative

La Farge



Agriculture - Business - Health
Natural Resources - Economic Development

Ten years ago, a handful of farmers met to establish an organic vegetable production cooperative to replace declining tobacco income. They had no idea that this venture would grow into the nation's largest organic farmer's cooperative. The Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP) now has over 160 members with 1998 revenue budgeted at \$27 million.

While the Cooperative still produces and distributes organic produce on a seasonal basis, it has added a producers' pools for dairy farmers, organic brown eggs, and meat. Its dairy segment now contributes approximately 95% of revenue. Under the cooperative's proprietary label, *Organic Valley...Family of Farms*, they have become the largest producer of organic milk in the country and enjoy approximately 70% market share in organic cheese.

Capitalized only by the farmers themselves, the cooperative enjoys a substantial competitive advantage through the number of its certified organic dairy farms that are in close proximity to its processing plants. This will enable the Cooperative to continue to be a major national manufacturer and distributor of organic cheese and ancillary products. This also enables the Cooperative to act nationally as a "balancing source" for other organic dairy processors.

The Cooperative's products, and organic food in general, have recently been recognized by consumers and chefs as offering superior quality and flavor. In 1996, Organic Valley Cheddar Cheese was recognized by the American Cheese Society as the "best cheddar in the country". In 1997, the Society bestowed its highest honor on Organic Valley butter.

The organic farming and food production industry has grown into a \$3.5 billion market. CROPP/Organic Valley product sales have grown between 44-62% each year over the past three years. The Cooperative provides milk prices for farmers of \$18-\$24/ cwt.

The Cooperative's ultimate goal is enhancing the economic stability of its farmer/members. CROPP is dedicated to creating an economically sustainable market for family farmers. They are also creating high quality employment in an economically disadvantaged area. Their direct employment has grown to over 60 individuals, primarily at their La Farge, Wisconsin headquarters. Additional retained/created employment on farms and at processing plants brings this total to well over 250. Through the production and promotion of organically produced products, the Cooperative believes it can accomplish these formidable goals while establishing an enterprise that will have a positive environmental effect.

Other communities, when local economic cooperation and strengths are identified, can copy this project to achieve worldwide, economic recognition, friendly use and stewardship of God-given assets, and community cooperation to achieve economic goals and financial freedom for the benefit of the whole community.