

Producers Summit Minutes  
 Montgomery Countryside Alliance  
 August 31, 2011  
 Button Farm Living History Center

**Introduction:** Thanks to all that made it out to the summit, it is only the beginning of working together to promote vibrancy in our Reserve and rural lands. A few notes:

- The producers listserve is a great place to swap expertise, you can join by sending an email with “join producers listserve” in the subject line to [producers@mocoalliance.org](mailto:producers@mocoalliance.org).
- Thanks so much to Whole Foods, Tony Cohen and his volunteers from Button Farm and Dolores Milmo of Audubon for making our event a success.
- Please consider joining MCA, memberships start at just \$25 and go a long way toward funding our work
- We would appreciate feedback on this event and a continued dialogue on the issues raised below (and any others you think of). Drop us a line anytime- [info@mocoalliance.org](mailto:info@mocoalliance.org)

**I. Welcome from Caroline-** we met on a chilly day in February and has a fruitful discussion, this is a follow up. Anxious to hear what challenges all are dealing with and find solutions, thank you for attending.

**II. Jill Ward of Whole Foods**

Whole Foods has been working with local food issues in the form of community and school gardens. Reserve products have been featured at Whole Foods for some time but more needs to be done to build those relationships. Jill can be contacted at [Jill.I.Ward@wholefoods.com](mailto:Jill.I.Ward@wholefoods.com)

Jill shared a list of what general kinds of products Whole Foods is looking for. [The full list is on the MCA website](#)- a partial list follows. Jill was careful to say that producers should not plant in line with this list thinking that Whole Foods will be a guaranteed buyer.

<b>Produce</b>	<b>Prepared Foods Department</b>	<b>Value Added/Processed</b>
-Conventional and Organic Onions	-Farmers seconds (particularly sweet potatoes, carrots and cucumbers)	-cheese (particularly sheep)
<b>Meat</b> WF follows a <a href="#">rigorous 5 step program</a> for all meat.	-Meat	-chocolates
-grass fed and finished beef and pork	-Partnerships- contracting to grow specific items for prepared foods department	-bulk teas
		-meatless/soy products/grains
		-vegan baked goods
		-gluten free bakery (certified)
		-artisan style cookies
		-soaps
		- <b>not</b> salsa

**III. Dick Stoner of MD Small Farm Cooperative, MCA Advisory Committee member**

Dick reported on previous efforts to form a mobile slaughter coop- efforts have stalled on this project as it is hard to compete with brick and mortar slaughter facilities.

Dick has now been working a barcoding system that will allow small farmers to compete in larger markets with the appropriate barcod for packaging plus an added 'QR code' system that tags food so that anyone with a smartphone can scan the code and immediately source that food straight to the farm it came from. This is part of a larger move toward "confirmed source" food. There is a value added producer grant from the usda pending to fund this project, they are hoping to have the system implemented by spring.

#### **IV. Discussion of Challenges**

**A. Sudden Chicken Die-Off-** Stan Fisher had a large number of chickens die with no sign of struggle with a predator. Some assembled thought it might be a weasel, they often do not leave traces of a struggle. The [Frederick Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory](#) was recommended as a place to take animals for autopsy. Night motion cameras were recommended to keep tabs on chickens and catch predators in the act.

**B. Deer-** Small farms can be fenced but larger acreage is harder to protect. Some have had luck with planting alternative tasty crops around the edges of fields, such as clover. Dogs have provided protection to some farms.

**C. Stink Bugs-** This remains a challenge this season, there is some research that suggests heavy snows actually help these pests to overwinter more successfully. It was suggested that praying mantises will eat them. Rocklands farm has had success with Basic H, an all natural plant spray. Another solution- for smaller areas, a trap can be made with a two liter bottle with the top cut off and inverted to make a funnel that can be climbed into but not out of. [The you tube how-to is here.](#)

**D. Aggregation of Products/ Value Added-** Currently farms are permitted to process items from the farm on the farm but not take in outside products. A special exception will allow widened processing. Jeremy Criss of Ag Services explained the complicated state of affairs at the county that keeps these "accessory uses" prohibited on farms. There is some move to get a ZTA passed that will help. Monica and Greg of [Mixed Greens Community Kitchen and CSA](#) are working on this issue as well. The food prepared in church commercial kitchens cannot be sold.

There are shared use commercial kitchens for rent in the county mentioned that would allow processing in the mean time particularly [The County Fair](#) . MCA also found a catering company, [4 a Grand Event](#) with comparable rates.

**E. Municipal Scale Composting-** Jessica Weiss of [growingSOUL](#) is looking for privately held land to do municipal scale composting that will remediate the soils of the county.

**F. MCA's new programs-** Both Land Link and Labor Link came out of the previous Producers Summit.

[Land Link](#) is launched- a site with posts from landowners offering land and farmers looking to expand or get started. We are looking for both farmers and landowners to become members and list properties or needs.

Labor Link is the next task- farmers have told us that stable labor is hard to come by, at the same time there are a growing number of unemployed and underemployed people in the county that could be put to work. We hope to work with Manna Foodbank and Casa de Maryland to meet these twin needs.

Jean Phillips shared information about the H2A program- laborers are brought in from other countries with visas and are paid \$10/hr and provided with a place to stay. The process is not too onerous. [Wwoof](#), [Idealist](#) and [ATTRA](#) were all suggested as labor options as well.

**G. Better Guidance for farmers**– Greg of Mixed Greens summed it up perfectly, “everything has just got to be made less complicated for the small farmer”. Specific needs for better guidance were outlined; it would be helpful for farmers to have simple 1-page fact sheets, titled “*So you want to...*” covering topics such as starting an egg operation, obtaining on-farm processing licenses, and all other certifications. These documents could be put together with help from the local farmers that have had to go through these processes. Farmers are encouraged to let MCA know what topics they would like covered by these sheets and if they can offer expertise to get some of them written.