CHAPTER 2

DIRECT MARKETING
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Use this document in conjunction with the companion website:

Links for New Farmers
http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/newFarmer/links.asp

hosted by the Sustainable Agriculture Program at the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources. Extensive additional information and updates are posted there.
DIRECT MARKETING

As a new farmer, you may be focusing on the physical parameters of your land, factors such as climate, soils, or pest pressures to determine what you will grow. While this is important, if you wish to have a business, before you plant or raise anything you need to determine what you can sell.

Faced with such high rates of farm bankruptcies, new farmers entering agriculture must be prepared to market their products. With direct marketing, the farmer makes sales directly to the consumer, generally getting higher prices and more income for their farm products. Both experienced and new farmers are integrating direct marketing into their farm enterprises as well as experimenting with new ways to generate farm income.

MARKET RESEARCH

It is beyond the scope of this manual to provide in depth information about how to conduct market research. However it is helpful to understand that market research is not difficult and can in large part be accomplished fairly easily by even the most novice farmer. It is, at its core, research and information gathering. It should be done before you decide what you want to produce.

- **Who will be your clients?** Consider the demographics of the area where you are located to determine who your potential clients may be. Are your clients city dwellers who attend farmers’ markets? Will you sell to chefs at local high end restaurants? Do you hope to draw local residents to your farm to purchase locally grown produce or to enjoy a farm experience? Would you like to sell to a particular ethnic group? Are your clients health conscious individuals who demand high quality organic produce?

- **Learn everything you can about your potential clients.** Find out their buying habits and their preferences. Observe them. Talk with them. Interview them. Survey them. Read about them. Try to determine if there is a need they have that you can fill. What products can you grow and produce that they would buy? How can you make your agricultural product uniquely different or superior to those of other farmers? Can you identify a lucrative niche?

- **Visit local stores.** Take a trip to local supermarkets, ethnic shops, food clubs, health food stores and gourmet shops. Observe what is selling and what makes an agricultural product the most appealing. Talk to customers about what they want and about what they would like to purchase that isn’t currently available.

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**Why direct marketing?**

*To survive.*

*Marketing on the Edge*

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**CERTIFIED ORGANIC**

With consumers showing increasing concern about how their food is grown and avoiding pesticide residues, retail sales of organic products has grown steadily over the past ten years. New farmers wishing to capitalize on this movement may opt for getting organic certification.

National Organic Program
www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexE.htm

Hawaii Organic Farmers Association (HOFA)
www.hawaiiorganicfarmers.org
**Research food trends.** Visit high scale restaurants to get an early read on upcoming food fashions. Read food and food trade magazines. Women’s magazines can also be valuable resources. Keep a sharp eye out for articles in popular and health magazines about the nutritional and health benefits of specific foods.

**Check out the competition.** Examine what your future competitors are doing. Think about ways they could improve.

**Decide what to grow.** The answers to these questions will help direct your final decisions about the variety of agricultural products that you want to produce. Don’t compete with corporate farms — try to identify products that are not usually found in supermarkets or that don’t travel well. Look for varieties that are attractive, colorful, and diverse in size and texture.

Remember to emphasize diversity in your agricultural product line to spread your economic risks. For new products start small, with a limited field trial. Experiment with new varieties. Keep records to remember how well they grow. Then test your new products before you commit large amounts of your energy and resources to growing them.

**Test your product:** Get consumer feedback on your agricultural products by giving samples to your customers. For example, at the farmers’ market, craft shows or agricultural fairs, you can meet your customers face-to-face and get their reactions.

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**HOT PRODUCTS at the Farmers’ Market**

- Fresh products (tree or vine ripened, fresh from the farm)
- Specialty items not found in supermarkets (new, unusual, exotic)
- Heirloom varieties
- Salad mix
- Herbs
- Ethnic
- Organic items
- Fresh flowers
- Value-added products

From *The New Farmers’ Market* by Vance Corum, Marcie Rosenzweig and Eric Gibson.

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**DIRECT MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES**

The following pages will give you an overview of some of the most popular direct marketing techniques being employed by farmers. As you read, try to pick out the marketing venues which best match your current level of expertise and resources.

**FARMERS’ MARKETS**

One of the best direct marketing venues for new farmers is the farmers’ market. At the farmers’ market, small scale producers can hone their business skills. This direct sales approach allows beginning farmers to establish their customer base, develop their marketing skills, test new products and get consumer feedback at low cost. It requires little to get started (your best clean produce, a table, a vehicle, insurance) and incurs little debt.

To excel at farmers’ markets, you must enjoy people – and you’ll be answering a myriad of questions about things like nutrition, your favorite recipes, and farm philosophy among other food related topics. An eye for presentation is invaluable as well. Projecting an image of abundance with the creative use of color, signage, and multi-level product placement will draw customers to your stand. Use the farmers’ market to help you develop your niche products. Talk to your clients. Match what you grow the best with what your clients like to buy. Take time at the farmers’ market to network with other farmers as well. They’re often your best teachers.
Aside from the farmers’ market, you may discover opportunities to sell your products at agricultural fairs, craft shows, and trade events as well.

Some marketing prospects which may arise from your contacts at the Farmer’s Market include direct sales, subscription farming, and value-added sales.

**FARM STANDS**

If your farm is well located, along major roadways with lots of traffic, and close to an urban area or tourist attraction, you may want to try building a farm stand to market your produce. The marketing and display skills that you learned from farmers’ markets can be directly applied to your farm stand venture.

Road stands can give a farmer an excellent start-up marketing outlet. You can start small with a modest seasonal stall and, as opportunity and ambition permit, expand to a year round country attraction with an expansive product line. Here are some considerations you should take into account.

- **Location**: Consumer studies from the mainland indicate that most people will only drive ten to twenty-five miles to shop at a roadside stand. If your farm isn’t located within this distance, consider partnering other farmers with a better location.

- **Zoning restrictions**: Check to see if the zoning ordinances for your property allow farm stands.

- **Building permits**: Farm stands range in design from the most simple open framed stall to elaborate buildings with extensive amenities. Initially you may wish to keep your costs down and start small (but keep room for expansion should your farm business prove to be very successful). If you do erect a structure, check first to determine if you need local building permits. Be sure your roadside stand parking lot is convenient, level and safe. There may be regulations which apply to your farm stand signage as well.

- **Government and local regulations**: Be sure you research and understand the state and local laws which affect on-farm sales. You may be subject to business licensing regulations, health and sanitation codes, weight and measures specifications, employment regulations, and fire and police ordinances.

- **Insurance**: Once you allow the public access to your property, you expose yourself to a greater risk. Check with your insurance carrier to be sure you have adequate liability coverage.

- **Security**: Roadside stands are vulnerable to theft and vandalism.

Your farm stand may eventually evolve into a **roadside market** (or a **farm store**), a direct market outlet that operates year round and

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**Where Does Your Food Come From?**

**Buy Locally Grown.**

It’s thousands of miles fresher.

**There Are Many Good Reasons To Buy Locally Grown Food**

- **You’ll get exceptional taste and freshness.** Local food is fresher and tastes better than food shipped long distances from other states or countries. Local farmers can offer produce varieties bred for taste and freshness rather than for shipping and long shelf life.

- **You’ll strengthen your local economy.** Buying local food keeps your dollars circulating in your community. Getting to know the farmers who grow your food builds relationships based on understanding and trust, the foundation of strong communities.

- **You’ll support endangered family farms.** There’s never been a more critical time to support your farming neighbors. With each local food purchase, you ensure that more of your money spent on food goes to the farmer.

- **You’ll safeguard your family’s health.** Knowing where your food comes from and how it is grown or raised enables you to choose safe food from farmers who avoid or reduce their use of chemicals, pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, or genetically modified seed in their operations. Buy food from local farmers you trust.

- **You’ll protect the environment.** Local food doesn’t have to travel far. This reduces carbon dioxide emissions and packing materials. Buying local food also helps to make farming more profitable and selling farmland for development less attractive.

When you buy local food, you vote with your food dollar. This ensures that family farms in your community will continue to thrive and that healthy, flavorful, plentiful food will be available for future generations.

*Courtesy of Foodworks Network <www.foodroutes.org>*
sells a wide variety of products. You would most likely be re-selling products from other farms in addition to your own agricultural products. Often these businesses use fresh produce as the major draw but diversify by adding food sales (such as a bakery or ice cream parlor, value-added products) or an entertainment component (animal petting zoos, mazes, hayrides, etc.). Read more about ag tourism further on.

U-PICK

Also known as “pick-your-own,” u-pick farming once seemed like a farmer’s dream come true ~ free labor. Customers would drive out to your farm, harvest and pack your produce, and then pay you for the experience! Actually U-pick does have a down side ~ your customers may damage your plants, accident liability insurance costs increase, and product prices tend to be low. However, it may still be a marketing option for some new farmers.

U-pick farming’s popularity appears to be tied to the economy and to the amount of time available to the cook of the household. Traditionally, u-pick flourishes when money is tight. Customers come to the farm to harvest lower priced foods which can be canned, frozen or preserved at home, helping keep the family food budget down. With more people working, time is now more at a premium and u-pick revenue has declined.

In today’s market, successful U-pick operations now generally include a component of ag tourism.

AG TOURISM

As urbanization increases and the hustle and bustle of city life ratchets up stress levels, many people are turning to nostalgic farm visits to spend their vacation dollars. Entrepreneurial farmers exploiting this trend can access recreational dollars in a number of creative ways. Some farmers are hosting events such as seasonal festivals (ex: Kona Coffee Festival) or agricultural fairs complete with cooking and crafting demos (The Ulupalakua Thing, Maui). Others may offer educational tours to appeal to local K-12 school students, showcasing processing demonstrations and providing displays and animal petting areas. Certain farms lend themselves to being marketed for weddings, corporate picnics and birthday parties. Farm families may open their homes to offer farm vacations or Bed and Breakfast stays. This marketing movement, known as entertainment farming or agri-tourism, is helping many farmers to stay in business.

Several Hawaii farmers have gotten a beginning in ag tourism via a Bed &Breakfast. If your county permits this form of business, if your farm or home has comfortable facilities to accommodate visitors, and if you and your family have the personality to interact cheerfully with the strangers who will be your guests, this may be a great option for your farm. Local farmers who are in the B&B business strongly recommend being affiliated with a Bed and Breakfast association, as it provides time-saving marketing services (via brochures and internet sales) which enhance the B&B sales. Expect to give a tour of your property and to have some products to sell to your guests.
In many cases ag tourism represents an evolutionary step for farmers who already have extensive experience with direct marketing via retail sales, value-adding, and food service. As described earlier, when you bring the public to your property you must address additional issues such as zoning restrictions, building and business permits, adequate parking, health code requirements, and increased liability risks.

In Hawaii and the Pacific, tourism has been a major sector of our local economy. Ag tourism can open a new niche market for our visitor industry. Contact the Hawaii State Department of Tourism (Product Enrichment Program) and the Department of Agriculture (Marketing Division) for assistance in setting up an agricultural-based tour product such as a farm festival or on-farm tour.

**Subscription Farming**

In subscription farming, farmers contract with their customers to provide a range of goods for a defined time period (a “season” in temperate climates). Customers prepay, allowing the farmer to cover production costs in advance and guaranteeing a good price for the produce. In exchange, clients receive a box of fresh, high quality produce weekly, usually delivered to a central pick-up spot. They also have the satisfaction of knowing where their food comes from and that they’re supporting a local family farm. Another similar term is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), where “shareholders” additionally commit time and energy on the farm to help with labor. People who relish the occasional experience of being on the farm and working the land may prefer to join a CSA.

Subscription farming enterprises thrive where small farms can provide a diverse array of consumer-ready products such as vegetables, fruits, herbs, meats, honey, milk products, and eggs to large urban populations located close to the farm. In Hawaii, apartment and condominium dwellers may prove to be a good market for this type of venture.

When you consider entering subscription farming, consider the following:

- **Production Diversity:** To keep subscribers happy, the farmer will need to produce a consistent supply and a wide range of fruits and vegetables. This requires a level of experience, growing and production skills which may take a couple of years for an entry-level farmer to learn. You may wish to partner with several other farmers to provide the variety needed to satisfy your customers.

- **Planting times and successive plantings:** The farmer needs excellent planning skills to ensure a constant supply of popular fruits and vegetables. If you’re just starting out in farming, start small and keep your initial crop list fairly simple and basic. With time and experience, you can add more variety to your produce boxes.

**THE CULINARY CONNECTION**

The Culinary Institute of the Pacific is a network of seven culinary education centers within the University of Hawaii system, located on the islands of O‘ahu, Maui, Hawai‘i and Kaua‘i. Kapi‘olani Community College has premiered a culinary tour, “A Taste of Oahu – a Hands-On Culinary Experience” for the visitor industry which includes a visit to a local farm.

In her book *Selling Produce to Restaurants*, Diane Green of Greentree Naturals describes how serving her farmers’ market customers evolved into a small subscription farming program.

“Initially, we targeted our established farmers’ market customers who often showed up too late to get the items they wanted. A lot of people want to shop at the farmers’ market for farm fresh, certified organic produce, but don’t want to spend their first day of the weekend having to show up early to get the best choice. So, I suggested that they give me their weekly grocery list, and I would bag it up and save it for them to come to market later. From this beginning, we then researched the SSA model, and began a local subscription service.”
Deliveries: A common pick up point, easily accessible to your customers and preferably equipped with refrigeration can be hard to come by. It is best if you can find a group of subscribers who are located close together, such as in a common neighborhood or at a place of business. Try to discourage home deliveries – they are expensive and time consuming.

Shareholders: Word of mouth tends to be the best form of advertising for subscription farming. Often satisfied shareholders will recruit for you. Be sure you have a brochure that explains what subscription farming is all about and sets realistic expectations for your subscribers.

RESTAURANT SALES

The Hawaii Regional Cuisine movement has initiated some very beneficial relationships between talented local chefs and exceptional local farmers. While it may look easy to the outsider, in reality only farmers with a certain level of expertise are able to supply the consistently high quality produce demanded by restaurants and resort hotels. In addition, these chefs expect premium service as part of the product.

Before deciding to direct market your products to local restaurants, consider this:

- **Highest Quality Produce:** To command a price premium you must provide a product which is superlative – fresh, delicious and reliably delivered. You must be able to consistently provide your restaurant clients with excellent produce over the course of the year (despite weather or pest problems). Guarantee your products and replace them if needed.

- **Highest Quality Service:** Part of the product which you will provide includes reliable deliveries as determined by the chef’s schedule and terms. You must establish a good relationship with both the chef and the business manager to be successful. Keep up with gourmet food trends and meet periodically with the chef to discuss what to grow and how to specialize your produce for their restaurant.

VALUE ADDING WITH PROCESSING

Once you’ve gotten some experience, you might want to add some value-added products to your lineup of merchandise. Perhaps your less-than-perfect produce can be made into pickles, relish, salsa, chutney, jam or jelly? Value-adding means that the farmer processes their product in some way (by cleaning, cooling, cooking, drying, handcrafting, spinning, weaving, etc.) and then labels, packages and sells it through direct marking techniques. Value adding is a great way to diversify your product line and to cushion your income for times of crop losses or during off-seasons.

“Dean Okimoto, the owner-operator of Nalo Farms, has built a highly successful business by supplying excellent-quality salad greens and fresh herbs to many of Hawaii’s top restaurants.

Dean started with one restaurant in the early nineties and has expanded to where his client list today includes most of Honolulu’s top restaurants and chefs, who in turn have won international recognition and numerous culinary awards for innovations such as Pacific Rim cuisine and Hawaii regional cuisine. Many establishments prominently feature Dean’s signature product Nalo Greens, a premier salad mix, on their menu.”

From Nalo Farms: Servicing High-End Restaurants
Expanding from fresh products into a processed food product line may appear deceptively simple. There are several steps, many of which are intertwined with complex government regulations.

- **Recipe development** – You may have a good recipe already for your fruits or vegetables. If you don’t, consider partnering with a local chef or with a culinary school or program to develop one. Your next step is to “commercialize” your recipe – to make necessary modifications so that it still tastes great in larger batches. Your recipe will be a proprietary secret.

- **Processing facility options** – To sell to the public you need to prepare your product in an approved food processing facility (or invest to build and maintain a commercial kitchen on your farm). There are specific federal, state and local laws and regulations regarding the processing of farm products, including livestock and poultry, and produce handling, cooking and packaging.

- **Ingredients and Packaging** – You’ll need to locate reasonably priced suppliers for the additional ingredients and packaging required for your product.

- **Labeling** – In addition to the marketing considerations you need to think of when designing your labels, food product labels have certain government required elements which must be met.

- **Product costs and product pricing** – To make a profit, you need to know your costs of production (both fixed and variable) and to determine your pricing strategy.

Value adding is an excellent way to grow and diversify your farm business. Successful agricultural entrepreneurs emphasize that you should start small and grow this aspect of your business slowly.

**INTERNET MARKETING**

Many farmers are finding that having a website greatly enhances their direct marketing strategies. Many farmers in Hawaii find them especially helpful for attracting out of state visitors to their ag tourism enterprise (such as a bed and breakfast). Another successful use for websites is for repeat sales from satisfied customers from the mainland and overseas.

Designing and supporting an eye-catching website that rises above the crowd requires an unusual combination of journalistic ability, graphic design talent, and computer savvy. It is very time consuming. If this sounds intimidating to you, your first step may be to sign on with a website such as Local Harvest (www.localharvest.org) or FoodRoutes.org which will give you a free listing. Link up with a Hawaii-based non-profit food organization that promotes sustainable agriculture (for a mainland example, visit Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, CISA, at www.buylocalfood.com). Some colleges and universities host similar

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**THE CULINARY CONNECTION**

**Maui Culinary Academy** at Maui Community College has a successful R&D program to concoct new value-added products. Partnerships with chef-instructors, students and local businesses have yielded such enticing new products as **Maul Raspberry Wine Jelly** (with Tedeschi Winery) and **Maui Roasted Pineapple jam** (with Maui Land and Pineapple). Consulting services for local farmers for product development will soon be available.
farmer friendly websites (visit Kapiolani Community College’s http://farmfresh.hawaii.edu/).

Farmers can collaborate to design a group website relating to a common marketing theme with individual web pages featuring a unique story about each member farm. Alternately you may be able to access professional assistance by joining a marketing cooperative, several of which provide websites as part of their services.

**COOPERATIVE MARKETING**

An excellent way to combine talents and resources is for a group (hui, using a local term) of farmers to organize into a cooperative to carry out some of the marketing functions done by middlemen. A marketing cooperative is an organization owned and operated by a group of farmers who produce similar products. Marketing co-ops may perform certain functions such as grading, packing, storing, cooling, shipping, promoting and selling. They may be able to negotiate volume discounts for purchasing production supplies (seed, fertilizer, containers, etc.) for their members.

Coops give participating farmers the opportunities and benefits of pooling products by grade and size, presenting a uniform product, and accessing services and economies of scale not available to the individual producer.

There are many existing Hawaii marketing cooperatives. The USDA Rural Development/Rural Business-Cooperative Service provides technical assistance to producers who are interested in forming a cooperative.

A cooperative can be organized to take on other business functions. There is a new trend for farmers to organize both formal cooperatives and informal partnerships to share the cost and use of expensive equipment (such as poultry processing equipment and refrigerated “portable stores”) and for building commonly shared facilities (such as freezers and commercial kitchens). These new alliances are allowing farmers to be more competitive and to stay in business.

**MANY MARKETING OPTIONS**

While we’ve discussed direct marketing at great length, primarily because it will give you the lion’s share of the consumer’s food dollar, there are many other marketing venues which we have not covered. You have the option of selling your product directly to wholesalers, to retailers, and to food processors.

Wholesalers are traditionally the farmer’s link to the marketing chain. Generally wholesalers package and grade a wide variety of agricultural products, assemble them into economically sized lots, and transport them to a wide range of retailers. Wholesale prices are generally lower than retail or direct sales.

If you can provide a reliable supply of high quality product, graded and packaged, and deliver it directly to the retailer, direct retail sales might work for you. Investigate whether institutional buyers such as school systems, the prison system, hotel
chains, retail store chains, warehouse stores, cruise lines, and the military are a good outlet for your product. If you have a niche product, specialty stores may be a good option.

Refer to the publication *This Hawaii Product went to Market* for excellent introductory information about these and other marketing options.

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**This Hawaii Product Went To Market: The Basics of Produce, Floral, Seafood, Livestock, and Processed Product Businesses in Hawaii**

This excellent local resource introduces basic business skills and then expands into marketing in great detail. Some of the topic areas include:

- marketing strategy
- production and market statistics
- Hawaii’s livestock products and markets
- government assistance in marketing
- grower or trade associations
- marketing cooperatives
- trade show basics
- elements of package design
- transporting your product
- quarantine regulations
- going commercial with a kitchen recipe
- adding value
- marketing to local retail florists, chefs, the military, institutional buyers, airport shops, and specialty stores
- exporting to a foreign market.
RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

COMPANION WEBSITE
Use this document in conjunction with the CTAHR website **Links for New Farmers.** Additional information and updates are posted there.

<www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/newFarmer/links.asp>


North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association is an organization exclusively dedicated to promoting farm direct marketing. They offer publications, conferences, trade shows, newsletters, and a special website (The Back Forty) for members only. <www.nafdma.com/>

LOCAL GROWN
*FoodRoutes.org* is a website devoted to assisting people to purchase locally grown produce. Their website offers a toolkit for food and farming advocacy work and several excellent downloadable promotional sheets such as Buy Locally Grown, It’s Thousands of Miles Fresher. <www.foodroutes.org/localfood/>

*Local Harvest* supports sustainable and organic farmers by providing a website with a clickable map for consumers to link up with local food producers. <www.localharvest.org/>

FARMERS’ MARKETS
Excerpts available online at: <www.nwpub.net/index.html>

*Growing for Market Magazine,* is a national monthly newsletter for direct market farmers. It is a source of information about growing and marketing produce, herbs and cut flowers. <www.growingformarket.com/>

Hawaii’s Agricultural Gateway (Hawaii DOA) - List of Hawaii Farmers’ Markets <www.hawaiiag.org/Markets/WelcometoMarkets.html>

ROADSIDE STANDS
*How to Establish and Operate a Roadside Stand* – UC Davis Small Farm Center <www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/Pubs/Family_Farm_Series/Marketing/roadside.html>

U-PICK
*Should I grow fruits and vegetables? Pick Your Own Markets* <ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/Upick-Shouldlgrow.pdf>

AGTOURISM
*Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook* <ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/dmkt.html>

*Ag Tourism in Hawaii: From Farmer to Visitor,* CTAHR Website <www2.ctahr.hawaii.edu/agtourism/ >

*ATTRA Entertainment Farming and Agri-Tourism:* On-line article about agri-entertainment. Includes tips and ideas from successful entertainment farming enterprises and techniques (farm recreation and hospitality businesses). Also available as downloadable Adobe PDF file. <attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/entertainment.html>

24  **DRAFT: Choosing the Road Less Traveled**
Agricultural Tourism Fact Sheets from UC Davix
<www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/agritourism/factsheets.html>

**SUBSCRIPTION AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE**

*Community Supported Agriculture: Making the Connection.* University of California Cooperative Extension. 1995

*Sharing the Harvest,* by Elizabeth Henderson with Robyn Van En. (Publisher: Chelsea Green. 1999). This manual provides an overview and step-by-step description of Community Supported Agriculture, including how to start and operate a CSA, management and production issues, sample documents from working CSA farms, pitfalls, and extensive resource and materials list.

**RESTAURANT SALES**

*Selling Produce to Restaurants,* by Diane Green, Greentree Naturals
<www.greentreenaturals.com>

**Chefs Collaborative** <www.chefscolaborative.org/>, a national network of more than 1,000 members of the food community who promote sustainable cuisine by celebrating the joys of local, seasonal, and artisanal cooking. It hosts the Farmer-Chef Connection website <www.farmerchefconnection.org>.

**VALUE ADDING**

