



# [www.oklahomafood.coop](http://www.oklahomafood.coop) Attention Oklahoma Urban Gardeners!

*Are your growing vegetables in  
your back yard? Why not grow  
some **MONEY** in your back yard!*

Here's our story. We could sell a TON of Oklahoma grown potatoes every month, at \$1.25/lb. Also . . . 2500 pounds of corn on the cob, hundreds of heads of cabbage, and tons of tomatoes (both paste and slicing), carrots, fresh peas and beans, cooking greens, heads of lettuce, onions, summer squash, and winter squash. We need hundreds of pints of berries and thousands of pounds of apricots, apples, and pie cherries. Everything we sell must be grown here in Oklahoma, so we can't just pick up the phone and call a food broker to ship a railroad car load of veggies our way.

That's what our "grocery list of unmet demand" at the Oklahoma Food Cooperative looks like. Our sales increased more than 100% each year, 2003-2007. **In 2008, we expect to sell a million dollars of local food and non-food products,** and by 2012, we will sell one million dollars a month – *if the production for the local market is there*. Right now, the demand for locally grown vegetables is way ahead of the actual supply.

## **Who we are and how we do business.**

The Oklahoma Food Cooperative makes it easy for people to buy food directly from farmers via an internet shopping system and a volunteer delivery system. Customers **and** producers are members. We do not buy wholesale and then sell retail. Each producer is his or her own "brand" in the coop. You set your own retail prices. Members order products at our website from individual producers, so you can develop "brand loyalty" to your products among our customer members.

Each month's order always opens on the **first day of the month** at 8 AM, and always closes at midnight on the **second Thursday**. As customers order, producers can check their business online. On Delivery Day – always the **third Thursday** – producers bring their products to Oklahoma City packaged & labeled for individual customers. Our online system produces delivery labels for you so all you have to do is copy, paste, print, cut and attach them to your product packages. Our Coop volunteers sort the products into the retail orders in a "barn-raising-style" event that is truly a sight to behold. The food then goes out to 23 pickup sites across the state operated by more volunteers.

We write you a check on delivery day for your products sold. If a producer sends products via our routes, we mail the checks. Once an item is checked in, if we lose or damage it during delivery, we pay for it. If a customer doesn't pay us, you get your money anyway. Instead of you finding customers, and delivering and collecting -- we find the customers, show them your products, organize the delivery, do the billing, and collect the money. You produce the food and cash your check. You pay us \$51.75 to join and then 10% of your sales. Is this a great deal or what?

We have **producers coming to town** from all over the state, and many of our producers "car-pool" their products so that everybody doesn't have to actually come to Oklahoma City, thus reducing the transportation cost.

## **How does this fit with the urban lifestyle?**

Check out the Small Plot Intensive ("SPIN Farming") method pioneered by Wally Satzewich and Gail Vandersteen in Saskatoon, Canada. They gross about \$50,000 a year off of a half acre of vegetables – and it is not even a contiguous half acre, their land is scattered around town in about 20 different plots! Their website, [www.spinfarming.com](http://www.spinfarming.com), has a wealth of how-to info for small plot market gardening. The method is scalable, from part-time to full-time, and their guides provide the beginning market gardener with just about everything you need to know to grow money right here in the city.

## **Small is good!**

We start small, or we don't start at all. We're not looking for one farmer to feed the entire state, we are looking for dozens – then hundreds – and later thousands – of farmers and gardeners to grow vegetables for direct sale to the public. Your back yard – and the yards of your friends or family – can make an important contribution to local food security – and you

will increase your own household's economic security with the additional income you can make from your market garden.

## Food With a Story

We do not sell anonymous mystery food. We sell food with a story – our story as the Coop, and your story as a producer. You may not think that you have much of a story, but our customers are interested in you and the issues of rural Oklahoma. If people want anonymous mystery food, they go to the supermarket. Our members expect something better.

## Production Issues

No you don't have to be organic, but it helps. Our members are interested in buying local foods, but they also like "more natural" production systems. The less commercial fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides that you use, the more you will sell. The coop does not have a requirement that you be certified organic, but you must declare your production practices at our website so members can make informed decisions. Less chemicals = better sales.

Our once-a-month system is a challenge for vegetable producers, because vegetables don't wait for a once a month market. Consider growing vegetables that keep well (potatoes, pumpkins, winter squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, cabbage, etc.) We have wheat and flour, but no corn, rye, oats, or spelt grains/flours/meal. We have many requests for dried peas and beans – all kinds. Season extension works – many fall planted vegetables can be stored and sold all winter. We have customers who drive into Texas to find organic chicken feed for their household flocks! They want to buy all-natural chicken feed or feed ingredients from Oklahoma farmers. There's money on the table here waiting for people to pick it up.

## What's the next step?

To support our growth, we need more producers of all food items and increased production from our existing producers. So we need more beef, pork, poultry, eggs, dairy, vegetables, grains – if you can grow it and get it to Oklahoma City or hitch a ride for it with another producer, our members will buy it.

We are not a closed coop, anyone can join who meets our requirements. There is no limit on how many producers can sell a given item. We **verify the locality of the production**, and **strictly forbid buying basic food items from the wholesale market and passing them off as local production**, so you won't have to compete against someone who is cheating by passing off California commercial farm tomatoes as Oklahoma vine-ripened family farm tomatoes.

To apply to become a producer member of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative. . .

- ★ Go to [www.oklahomafood.coop](http://www.oklahomafood.coop). Click on BASIC, then JOIN, and fill out the application to become a member of the coop. The membership share which everyone buys when they join costs \$51.75. After completing this application and getting your member number, go to [www.oklahomafood.coop/okfoodservice.php](http://www.oklahomafood.coop/okfoodservice.php). Scroll down and you find a link to fill out an online application to become a producer-member. There are separate applications depending on whether you are selling food or non-food items. If you will sell both, you complete both applications.
- ★ When you complete the producer application, the information is sent to our Standards committee, which will make a recommendation to our Board of Directors. The board meets once each month and votes on new producers, so figure on at least a month for the application approval process. Don't wait until the last minute before harvest to apply!
- ★ We require that new producers come to one Delivery Day before their products can be sold through our system for an in-person orientation.. We expect you to spend about 4 hours working with our delivery day volunteers, meeting the other producers, and discussing your product with our Standards and Producer Care committee members who are on-site. This way you get a good understanding of our distribution system and cooperative methods and nobody reinvents any flat tires.
- ★ We can provide advice on marketing & pricing your product. We want all of our producer members to earn a fair price for their products. We will help you tell your story so your products will sell.

## Local Food is the next big thing in the grocery industry.

There is a huge unmet demand for locally produced food in Oklahoma's cities. Growing food and selling it direct to the public offers serious opportunities to both rural farmers and urban gardeners to diversify and increase their income. We provide excellent opportunities for new farmers and gardeners – especially young people – to start small and grow. We are not afraid to start small, because we know that we "start small, or we don't start at all." Please contact us to discuss how your farm or garden production can be marketed directly to Oklahoma customers through our Cooperative.

***From our family farms, to your family tables. | [www.oklahomafood.coop](http://www.oklahomafood.coop)***