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A Marketing-System Approach to Removing Distribution Barriers Confronting Small-Volume Fruit and Vegetable Growers

David B. Eastwood, John R. Brooker, Forrest Steglin, Tim Woods, and Ed Estes

Changing food-consumption patterns favoring fresh-produce production and the emergence of convenience packaging have created opportunities for fruit and vegetable production. Changing information technology, processing, wholesaling, and transportation continue to favor larger market participants who benefit from specialized managerial and coordination activities. Small-volume growers have difficulty meeting the purchasing requirements for many types of outlets. Part of the problem faced by rural areas and smaller growers relates directly to market access. Comparisons of the marketing-channel infrastructures among states with comparable growing conditions but different market development should serve to pinpoint critical problem areas.

A grant funded by the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (USDA/IFAFS) is underway to provide a set of guidelines for market

development with an emphasis on small produce growers. Produce market-channel development is being analyzed in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The scope of the project is to identify factors contributing to different produce-market development experiences in the four states, compare them, and draw conclusions about overcoming the barriers to market development.

The scope of work entails collecting information from stakeholders in the produce-marketing systems in each state. Relevant information gathering is underway through interviews with key participants. Five questionnaires have been developed for Extension, market managers at public year-round facilities, marketing agents, State Departments of Agriculture, and growers. Each of these instruments was described along with overviews of the sampling approaches that are in use.

Eastwood and Brooker are professors at University of Tennessee, Steglin is associate professor at University of Georgia, Woods is associate extension professor at University of Kentucky, and Estes is professor at North Carolina State University.

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