

Naturally Meramec  
Regional Meeting  
August 25, 2015  
Meramec Regional Planning Commission  
St. James, MO

Attendees: Brenda Story - Blue Hill Company, LLC; Jimmy Story - Missouri Enterprise; Penelope Beache - Slow Food St. James; Triston Beache - Vintage Homesteader; Phyllis Hannon - Nature's Organic Haven; Dale Ridder – Nature's Organic Haven; Peter Hofherr - St. James Winery; Debbie Huff-Old School on the Hill Bed and Breakfast; Betty Lindhardt - Osage County Agritourism; Nancy and Mike Herold - Sacred Fire Farms; Angie Rolufs - Missouri University of Science and Technology; Jane Barres - Moon Dance Farm; Sherry Licklider - Country Belle Cafe; Larkin Busby - DL Farms; Chuck and Jane Held - The Nutty Pig Farm; Teri Hoon Willsey - Hummingbird Kitchen; Janice Thomas - Swiss Meat and Sausage; Sharon Fennwald - Swiss Meat and Sausage; Stewart Darrah-City of Belle; Mike and Jacque Bottom - Knee Deep Farms; Ron and Marie Selfors - Sustainable Ozarks Partnership; Rosella Roberts - Steelville Arts Council; Kim Jones - Kill-Kim Foods, LLC; Chrysa Niewald - Owensville Chamber of Commerce; Anne Rademacher - Owensville Chamber of Commerce; Deborah Kleinheider - St. James Marketplace Cafe; Angie Parrett - By Design Media; Greg Harris - Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc.; Beth Wiles - Pulaski County Tourism; Barb Huse - City of Belle; Steve Vogt - Belle Chamber of Commerce

MRPC Staff: Bonnie Prigge, Connie Willman and Lyle Thomas

**Introductions:** Bonnie Prigge, MRPC Executive Director, welcomed guests and introduced Connie Willman, MRPC Community Development Specialist for Naturally Meramec, and Lyle Thomas, MRPC Community Development Specialist. Bonnie expressed the importance of the Naturally Meramec project for its potential to assist agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses across the eight-county Meramec Region. Participants were asked to introduce themselves and their business.

**Naturally Meramec Overview:** Connie Willman provided a review of the consortium project. The purpose is to bring agriculture, tourism and culinary businesses together to find ways to use and market each-other's products/services and creates a culture of businesses that benefit from symbiotic relationships with other producers/suppliers/customers. County meetings have been held in all eight counties in the region. This is the first meeting of the regional consortium. Willman also mentioned that a web site and brochure will be part of the program products.

**Presentation:** Peter Hofherr, CEO of St. James Winery, spoke about agribusiness/agritourism in the Meramec Region. St. James Winery is a two-generation, family business that was established in 1970. St. James wines are currently distributed in 17 states. The winery receives between 80,000 and 100,000 visitors each year. Hofherr reminded attendees that the Naturally Meramec Consortium will be a cluster development exercise, stating that Clusters are 'geographical concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions' (Porter 2000). The wine cluster has ties to agricultural, hospitality, tourism and food clusters. The goal of the project is to improve regional competitiveness and speed up development of all related clusters. Benefits of the consortium will be economies of scale, reduced costs, faster innovation and product development, increased attention from suppliers and service providers, access to a labor force with specialized skills and increased attention from government and academia. Hofherr shared some results from research he conducted which show wine trails and associated businesses are key for tourism development in the region.

**Needs summary:** Connie informed the participants that the attendees of the county meetings had identified a list of needs of their businesses. Participants reviewed the needs to determine changes, clarifications or additions. Following the discussion, the participants were asked to prioritize the needs, using eight dots to vote. They were allowed to "spend" the dots any way they wanted, putting multiple dots on a need if they believed it to be of more importance. The list of prioritized needs follows:

1. Need to educate each other on existing businesses in the region. (19 votes)
1. Need to link websites for agriculture/tourism businesses and find ways to encourage web site traffic (19 votes)

2. Need for additional marketing.(18 votes)
Need financing for marketing
Need to investigate cost-effective marketing avenues
Need help in identifying target consumers
Need help with marketing strategy
Other marketing needs as identified
3. Need a website or other vehicle to connect the 600+ businesses that have been identified across the region (16 votes)
4. Need for employees.(15 votes)
Need for part-time and seasonal workers as well as long-term
Need to allow those who receive entitlements to work agriculture jobs without losing entitlements.
Need to make businesses aware of the international workers internship—Work Away International if they are in need of workers.
Need to investigate use of volunteers
Other employee needs as identified
5. Need to promote regional cross-sales of products (14 votes)
6. Need more exposure/recognition for those using local products/services (Possible food critics that feature those.) (13 votes)
7. Need to create a map showing the locations of each business, along with hours, etc. (12 votes)
7. Need to create a billboard which would identify website for local businesses (12 votes)
7. Need to expand markets: (12 votes)
Need to expand to larger areas (regional/state/national). Be sure to promote in Kansas City and St. Louis.
Improve ability to connect with wholesale markets.
Need more farmer's markets and additional opportunities for farmers to sell additional products that may currently be restricted in some communities
Other market expansion as identified
8. Need more events and venues in which to feature products/services. (11 votes)
8. Need education of consumers on agriculture processes connecting consumers with producers (11 votes)
9. Need rural transit or tourist shuttles to accommodate customers (10 votes)
10. Need Facebook presence for Naturally Meramec (9 votes)
11. Need a better understanding of laws (i.e. taxation, etc.) (6 votes)
11. Need to investigate opportunities to group-purchase for businesses, including insurance. (6 votes)
12. Need to encourage communities to go back to basics—bakeries, sausage makers, etc. (5 votes)
12. Need for additional organic suppliers (Example: Nature's Organic Haven, LLC – Phyllis Hannon) (5 votes)
12. Need to investigate ways to change culture/mindset for agriculture and education of public. (5 votes)
13. Need a database of connections and potential customers (4 votes)
13. Need for Training: (4 votes)
Need food safety and regulations training.
Need to train employees on customer service
Other training as identified
14. Need more exposure to producers, the public and other outlets. (2 votes)
14. Need an updated list of business resources (2 votes)

**Next Steps:** Willman asked participants for input on the consortium and if they would be interested in participating. Input was positive and most attendees want to be part of the developing consortium. The group decided to meet bi-monthly. A list of attendees will be distributed, along with the notes from this meeting.

**Marketing Opportunity:** Willman advised the group that MRPC will hold its annual dinner on October 30 at the Havener Center in Rolla. Attendees were asked to participate in a “Naturally Meramec Consortium” display of local products and services. Those interested were asked to sign a roster.

**Refreshments/Networking:** Following the meeting, participants were asked to stay and have refreshments while networking. Refreshments were provided by: Swiss Meat and Sausage Company, St. James Marketplace Café, Kill-Kim Foods LLC, St. James Winery, and Hummingbird Kitchen. Earth-friendly tableware was provided by Earth-To-Go.