**Marketing Cooperatives for**

**Incubator Farmers**

**A Brief Overview**

**History and Context**

The World PEAS Cooperative was founded in 2005, as part of the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project (New Entry). New Entry’s mission is to train beginning and immigrant farmers to have a successful farm business growing livestock and/or vegetables, and teach farm business skills. World PEAS is dedicated to providing a market for the beginning and immigrant farmers that are in training with New Entry. Farmers in the World PEAS program have farms that are: 1/4 to 5 acres of land and range in farming experience from one to ten years. English may not the first language for some of the farmers, and all the farmers have a number of non-farm commitments like school, other jobs, and families.

In 2005, World PEAS began to assist groups of farmers with cooperative marketing by attending farmers’ markets with produce from all of the program farmers. The following year, World PEAS continued going to farmers’ markets, started to sell wholesale to supermarkets, and began a CSA. In 2007 World PEAS expanded group sales at farmers’ markets, expanded the CSA from 15 to 45 shares, and transferred wholesale sales to individual farmers. At this time, shareholders picked up their shares at the farm. In 2008, to expand the program, World PEAS began delivering shares to two remote locations in addition to the on-farm pickup. With three pickup locations, the number of shareholders grew to 100. In 2009, membership expanded to 218 shares, at 9 pickup locations. In 2010, World PEAS plans to sell 325 shares and distribute at the same 9 locations. The CSA model has additional benefits for the beginning and immigrant farmers that grow for the World PEAS CSA. The CSA provides a market to these farmers who otherwise might not have the volume of produce, time, language skills, or technical skills to sell to other markets or to start their own CSA. In addition, the CSA also supports the educational work of New Entry by providing a secure market to create a startup business plan.

**Staffing and Key Partners**

**CSA Manager**

The CSA manager provides administrative oversight for World PEAS by setting goals for the following year, supervising the CSA coordinator and project interns, and managing high level financial decision-making. This position requires approximately 5 – 10 hours per week depending on the season and is filled by the New Entry program and finance coordinator.

**CSA Coordinator**

The CSA coordinator is a full-time, year-round employee who oversees day-to-day operations of the CSA as well as project interns (in conjunction with the CSA manager), packing volunteers, and delivery staff. The coordinator is in charge of accepting crop bids from farmers during the winter and negotiating purchases and deliveries from farmers during the growing season. They also coordinate delivery locations, promotions and recruitment of shareholders, and share composition.

**Assistant CSA Coordinator**

The assistant CSA coordinator is responsible for ensuring efficiency in the packing and delivery process through the oversight and management of packing volunteers and deliveries. This is a full-time, seasonal position.

**CSA Packing Volunteers**

World PEAS relies on the generosity of approximately 5 – 10 volunteers per season who pack shares in the mornings on our three delivery days. These volunteers often return season after season, and are recruited through word of mouth and our organizational newsletters.

**Interns**

A number of interns and work study students provide support both during the growing season and throughout the winter with tasks as varied as packing and distributing shares, outreach and promotions, special project such as low-income programs, etc. These students are recruited through local and affiliated colleges and universities.

**Partners**

The CSA conducts outreach through New Entry’s sponsoring organization, Community Teamwork Inc. and Tufts University (as well as through the usual media and promotional channels). We partner with various workplaces and community members for distribution sites and partner closely with community organizations such as senior housing agencies. The CSA also purchases products from established local farms to supplement what we receive from New Entry program farmers. This reduces risk and allows us to provide attractive “add-on” items like fruit in our shares.

**Resources**

The CSA staff relies heavily on email and phone communication to stay in touch with farmers regularly about their crop availability. Much of the CSA is organized and managed through complicated Excel spreadsheets that track shareholders, payments, crop availability, share contents, etc.

Salaries and Benefits $87,073

Interns $2,500

Electricity (coolers) $5,684

Equipment purchases $2,112

Insurance $461

Internet $1,023

Cell phone reimbursement $251

Outreach and promotions $2,280

Rent on packing space $7,000

Packing supplies $9,275

Local travel $2,044

Vehicle maintenance $1,498

Total $121, 201

Note that the above budget accounts only for operating expenses. New Entry also serves as a “pass through” for what shareholders pay in, the vast majority of which is paid back out to farmers. In 2011, New Entry paid farmers $174,882, and projected payments for 2012 are roughly $170,000.

**Key Activities**

**Pre-season**

* Engage in outreach to beginning farmers through New Entry’s Farm Business Planning Class and explain the services that World PEAS offers, as well as the process for selling into the cooperative
* Go through a selective bidding process
* Work with farmers on quality standards
* Make farmer payments (both in advance and after delivery)
* Plan share content and determine price for shares
* Procure packing supplies (boxes, rubber bands, plastic bags)
* Outreach and recruitment of new shareholders
* Track shareholder payments and information
* Seek out wholesale markets and create contracts as appropriate
* Recruit packing volunteers

**Growing Season**

* Negotiate product availability and deliveries with farmers to ensure full boxes, high quality, and timely deliveries
* Oversee packing volunteers and interns
* Provide refrigeration and storage for farmer crops
* Source produce from outside distributors to fill gaps in supply
* Send out weekly newsletters to shareholders with farmer profiles, recipes, content information, etc.
* Distribute CSA shares to various sites for pickup
* Ongoing customer service

**Post-season**

* Implement improvements such as acquiring new equipment, upgrading facilities, etc.
* Administer shareholder satisfaction survey and analyze results, incorporating feedback into future year’s planning
* Meet with farmers post-season to discuss changes for the following season and overall feedback
* Update all website information