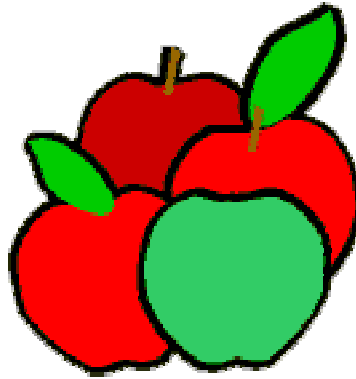


**Response to Massachusetts Department of Food and
Agriculture RFR#AGR-SC01**



**A proposal to increase membership, viability, and
profitability of the Massachusetts Fruit Growers
Association (MFGA) by developing, funding, and
completing a ‘Marketing Plan’**

Total Request: \$52,750

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The Opportunity

The Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association (MFGA) is THE organization that represents commercial tree fruit growers in Massachusetts. Members consist mainly of dedicated orchardists that cultivate and market an apple, pear, peach, plum, and cherry crop that contributes an average of \$15,000,000 to the Massachusetts economy every year.

Currently, there are just over 100 Active and Associate members of the Association, which has a long history of influencing the direction and personality of the tree fruit industry in Massachusetts. MFGA has been a strong proponent of tree fruit research in Massachusetts and New England, and generously purchased and donated a 200-acre farm in Belchertown, now known as the UMass Cold Spring Orchard Research and Education Center. MFGA currently supports ongoing research and maintenance there via an actively managed endowment.

MFGA also hosts the New England Fruit Meetings in Sturbridge, MA, which attracts hundreds of fruit growers from New England and New York to nationally recognized educational sessions and trade show exhibits every year in January. The New England state extension tree fruit specialists cooperate with MFGA in developing the educational program. MFGA also conducts its Annual Meeting during the Meetings.

Traditionally, MFGA membership have focused on the wholesale side of fruit growing and marketing, however, recent changes in the economics of fruit growing have brought about the importance of focusing on the retail/direct market side of the membership. As the wholesale industry adapts (i.e., consolidates) to the current economic situation, it has become more important for the Association to take an active role in promoting itself. Self-promotion needs to occur both internally (by increasing membership and the perceived value of being a member) and to consumers to achieve MFGA's primary aim, *that of improving the viability and profitability of fruit growing in Massachusetts.*

After a meeting of the MFGA Marketing Committee in December 2001, it was agreed to develop a 'Marketing Plan for the Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association' with the following objectives:

1. Increase the number of and participation by Active members of MFGA by increasing the perceived value of the organization to the industry as a whole and to its individual members
2. Increase the visibility and benefits of MFGA to the public who are customers of our orchards, farm-stands, groceries, recreational/agri-tourism experience, and pre-K-12 students

At its Annual Meeting on January 9, 2002, the MFGA membership voted affirmatively to pursue the Marketing Plan and actively seek funding to carry it out. This proposal requests funding from the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture ('Specialty Crops' assistance package) to develop and implement (all or in part) the MFGA Marketing Plan with the goal of strengthening the viability of MFGA and the profitability of its membership, as well as promoting Massachusetts agriculture in general.

The Marketing Plan

The Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association Marketing Plan will integrate four strategies that capitalize and expand upon already resources of MFGA. In detail, these include:

Expanded Communication

Logo Development—MFGA does not have an identity logo. Production of a simple and distinctive logo to be used in all communication is an important first step in promoting and uniquely identifying MFGA as the commodity organization that represents orchardists in Massachusetts. A professional designer will be contracted to develop the logo, which will be used in all correspondence, web site, publications, etc.

Enhanced Web Site—The existing MFGA web site, www.massfruitgrowers.org, was first developed thanks to a DFA Marketing Grant (2001). Now it is time to leverage the ability of a web site to be a more useful tool for MFGA members to help conduct business amongst themselves, and to provide timely, comprehensive information about its membership and their orchard businesses to the public. This will be accomplished using a database structure, wherein orchards can be searched by location, type of fruit sold, hours of operation, etc. The current web site hosting/design arrangement will be contracted to produce the searchable database and related web pages with

information about MFGA easily accessible to all visitors. An e-mail list to facilitate information exchange and networking amongst members will be included.

Promotional Brochure/Map—MFGA currently has nothing printed to give to prospective members, the public, industry representatives, the media, or government officials to outline our objectives and member's orchard/business information. The Association needs to have such a promotional tool in conjunction with the web site to satisfy the information dissemination needs of the organization. A design/printing contractor with experience in orchard publications and the needs of such an organization as MFGA will be chosen to produce the publication. Exact details (pages, size, format) are to be arranged and will be evaluated by the Marketing Committee, and will further depend on funding and anticipated audience.

Press Releases—Press releases are an effective way to get the word out and generate additional publicity during the short time when fruit is in-season and customer traffic needs to be prompted or increased. MFGA proposes to contract-hire an individual with communications experience to develop and distribute press releases to the media during critical periods when fruit is in-season and customer traffic needs to be enhanced.

Advertising Rebate

MFGA members already dedicate a portion of their own budget to advertising their business in the media, thereby indirectly marketing and promoting the fruit industry as a whole. An advertising rebate for MFGA members will leverage advertising dollars already being well spent, result in some money going directly back into the pockets of members, promote Massachusetts Agriculture, and promote the Association with the required inclusion of the MFGA logo in all rebate-eligible paid advertising. For the 2002 growing season, it's proposed that MFGA Active and Associate members will be reimbursed by MFGA for 50% of their media advertising cost up to a maximum of \$2,500 for Active members and \$500 for Associate members. Such advertising must include the MFGA logo, and copy be submitted to the MFGA Marketing Committee for eligibility. Rebates will be available on a 'first-come, first-serve' basis until funds are depleted.

New England Fruit Meeting

The format of the New England Fruit Meeting has remained static for some years now. The Association feels the need to significantly change/overhaul the Meeting Program to insure continued attendance by both growers and paying trade show exhibitors. Proposals include addition of an apple variety/apple products showcase, and/or a day-before/evening program of interest to a wider audience, including part-time/backyard fruit growers and the general public. Additional advertising and promotional spending will be necessary to support such an enhanced program. Additional meeting facility costs will also likely be incurred if the Meeting Program is expanded.

UMass Cold Spring Orchard

Research Match—As mentioned, MFGA has a vested interest in the University-owned UMass Cold Spring Research and Education Orchard. The Association, as well as UMass, has a goal of making the Orchard a focus for fruit research and education both in Massachusetts and throughout New England. Funding of fruit research—although partially supported by income from a well-managed endowment—could be substantially increased to make a real impact on orchard production and marketing issues faced by growers today. A 50-50 dollar match for competitive research funding already being awarded by the Trustees of the Horticulture Research Center (from endowment income) is proposed, and will substantially increase the depth and breadth of fruit research being conducted at the research Orchard.

Education Program—There is already a pre-K-3rd grade education program for elementary school students at Cold Spring Orchard consisting of fall orchard tours. MFGA supports the idea of expanding and improving such programs. Some of the issues that growers face (weather, environment, global competition, encroaching development, IPM, etc.) in producing a seasonal fruit crop are explained to the future consumers of Massachusetts fruit. Also, such educational efforts promote the importance of maintaining viable orchards as part of Massachusetts working landscape. The fledgling program currently in-place needs consistent funding to hire a part-time education coordinator for the Orchard to further develop and sustain the education program. Such a program could be used as a model for MFGA members to use in their own business, as well as lead to production of education aids/curriculum material relating to fruit growing and its importance to Massachusetts

communities. Our proposal asks for funding to support this position of education coordinator at UMass Cold Spring Orchard, and it's anticipated the responsibilities of the position may include other marketing efforts on behalf of MFGA. (Press releases, promotional publications, etc.)

PROPOSED BUDGET

To accomplish our objective of developing and implementing this marketing plan, we propose the following budget:

ITEM	REQUEST	MATCH*	TOTAL
Logo Design and Brochure <i>...includes estimated initial printing and distribution of 5,000</i>	\$2,250	\$1,000	\$3,250
Enhanced Web Site <i>...development of member database, e-mail list, other enhancements</i>	\$3,500	\$1,000	\$4,500
Advertising Rebate <i>...50% rebate to qualified member advertising</i>	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$40,000
New England Fruit Meeting <i>...funds dedicated to additional program, speaker</i>	\$2,000	\$1,500	\$3,500
Cold Spring Orchard Research Match <i>...funds applied to competitively awarded research</i>	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$30,000
Cold Spring Orchard Education Program <i>...funds to be used for partial support of education coordinator</i>	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$15,000
TOTAL	\$52,750	\$43,500	\$96,250

* Notes on MATCHING FUNDS

The success of the Marketing Plan relies on matching funds (either in-kind or cash) to complete the Plan. Additional details of matching funds are as follows:

- For the Printed Brochure, MFGA will incur expense in promotion and distribution.
- MFGA already supports the annual fee and updates to the Web Site, as indicated by the match.
- Individual grower members must pay 50% of the cost of advertising to be eligible for the Advertising Rebate.
- MFGA anticipates the overall expense of promoting and changing the format of the New England Fruit Meeting to be higher than the amount requested. Match will be in dollars or in-kind donation of time.
- MFGA, via it's endowment fund and competitive awarding of research funds by the Trustees of the Horticulture Research Center, will provides 50% of the cost of supported research.
- The UMass Cold Spring Orchard provides facilities, staff support, and other infrastructure necessary to run the education program described.

- The MFGA Marketing Committee will invest considerable time in coordinating and supervising development, implementation, and finalizing components of the this Marketing Plan, all representing in-kind donation of time and expense.

SUMMARY

This proposal to fund the Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association Marketing Plan represents a sincere effort by an existing Massachusetts commodity group to strengthen itself as an organization while at the same time clearly benefiting it's individual membership and Massachusetts agriculture as a whole. It seems to be in clear agreement with DFA's request for proposals that "clearly promote Massachusetts agriculture from Massachusetts agricultural organizations and other agricultural entities that directly supports agricultural initiatives, including commodity groups, cooperatives, non-profit organizations, and collaboratives, whether local or regional." Thus, we hope that DFA reviews this request for \$52,750 favorably and can help MFGA be successful in developing and implementing this Marketing Plan.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Letter of support from Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association
2. Jon Clements Resume
3. New England Fruit Meetings & Trade Show, 2002 Program
4. Massachusetts Fruit Growers Association Web Site Home Page
5. UMass Cold Spring Orchard 2001 letter to schools
6. UMass Cold Spring Orchard 2001 Fall School Orchard Tour video