

Title Development of small-scale vegetable and fruit producers for an expanding urban market in Las Vegas, Nevada

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Abstract

Southern Nevada, located along the eastern edge of the Mojave Desert, contains the rapidly growing city of Las Vegas, home to nearly two million people and attracting 40 million visitors each year. Las Vegas has one of the largest food service industries in North America and has emerged as a restaurant destination for tourists due to the growth in quantity and quality of gourmet restaurants. Many of these gourmet restaurants were opened by chefs who have a history of using locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. These chefs have been known to pay as much as US\$ 16 per kg of fresh vegetables shipped overnight from markets in California, Arizona, Utah and the Midwestern U.S. Virtually all of the food imported into Las Vegas comes from distances greater than 250 miles with more than 99% of it coming from another state. Every dollar spent on imported food is one dollar lost from the local economy. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association estimate that if every family in Maine spent \$ 10 dollars a week on local food, it would put \$ 104 million into their local economy. Southern Nevada has little history of production agriculture because of its reliance on tourism and subsequent large service industry, the lack of a land grant (agricultural) university, and the region's geographic isolation and harsh, desert climate. Although prices and local acceptance by chefs for locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables potentially make production in southern Nevada economically feasible, two primary barriers have yet to be surmounted: local production of sufficient quantities of high quality food by inexperienced growers and adequate marketing or distribution channels. A research and demonstration program area of the University of Nevada has aimed at stimulating local production of fresh food by rural producers in close proximity to Las Vegas and assisting these producers in developing marketing channels for their fresh, high value products into Las Vegas.