

Rural Business and Cooperative Service • Rural Business Development Grant Program

Small Farm Feeds Local Appetite for Sustainable Products

When Geoff Scott and John Mathia teamed up to open a farm in northwest Oregon, they envisioned producing high-quality meat raised in an environmentally-sustainable manner. Their products were attractive to local customers and sold quickly, enabling them to expand to a 47-acre plot in Hillsboro. However, they struggled to find resources to support their continued growth.

“It’s hard to be a small farmer,” said Geoff. “There’s no help out there for the business side of operations.”

When they discovered the Ag of the Middle Accelerator Program operated by the nonprofit Ecotrust, they decided to enroll. The program, supported by a [USDA Rural Business Development Grant](#), provides technical assistance to small and mid-sized farmers, ranchers, and fishers to help scale up their operations and adopt regenerative agriculture practices.



Marion Acres is helping to meet local demand for sustainably-produced agricultural products in northwest Oregon.

By protecting the topsoil and increasing biodiversity using cover crops and management-intensive grazing in place of tilling and pesticides, regenerative agriculture helps to trap carbon in the soil and mitigate climate change while also producing more nutrient-rich products. Transitioning, however, is time intensive and costly.

“The transition requires new equipment and increased labor costs, which can result in reduced profit for anywhere from five to ten years,” said Maia Hardy, Ecotrust’s Ag of the Middle Program Manager. “Many farmers simply can’t afford it.”

Ecotrust helped Marion Acres access grant funding and find marketing opportunities. “This training filled the gap,” said Geoff. “It was, and will continue to be, vitally important for the local food movement.”

Marion Acres continues to expand, selling pasture-raised chicken, beef, pork, turkey, and eggs to restaurants in Portland and opening a market on their farm that will offer locally-sourced, organic, pasture-raised, and grass-fed products. “Our goal is to provide good-paying jobs and an example of sustainable agriculture,” said Geoff. Already, their neighbors have expressed interest in the farm’s success and approach to environmental stewardship.

Obligation Amount:	\$80,000 grant
Date of Obligation:	July 2017
Congressional District:	Representative Bonamici, District 01; Senators Wyden and Merkley
Impact:	The technical assistance provided through the Ag of the Middle Accelerator Program is training more than 30 farmers and ranchers in the Pacific Northwest and helping their operations remain viable during the transition to regenerative agriculture.
