



# Measuring Success on the "Urban Fringe:" Meadowlark Farm

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The Northwest Direct farm case studies were developed to provide in-depth information about the direct and semi-direct marketing opportunities that exist for farmers within their regional food system and how these opportunities are captured by a diverse set of successful producers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Direct marketing strategies employed by the farmers featured in this series include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), u-pick, farm stand and on-farm sales. Semi-direct marketing strategies include sales to restaurants, caterers, retailers (grocery stores, butchers, etc.) and processors, arranged and completed by the farmer him/herself without the use of brokers or wholesalers.

In 2002 and 2003, members of the case study research team performed in-depth on-farm interviews with each of the 12 farm families in this study. Interviews were transcribed, financial information was collected, reviewed and interpreted and outlines for the case study content were developed. Professionals were hired to write the case studies. Each case study went through a series of reviews by the case study farmers, university faculty and research team members with final permission for publishing and distribution given by the farmers themselves.

The nature of profitable small acreage farming demands flexibility and the willingness to change. These case studies, therefore, reflect a "snapshot in time" of each farm. Readers should be aware that these farms have undoubtedly evolved since the initial interviews. They should also be aware that the unique nature of each farm necessitates an individualized treatment of the analysis of farm profitability and the criteria by which that is measured. The case studies contain financial information to the extent that farmers were willing to share, and reflect our intention to educate the reader, while at the same time protecting the farmers' need for confidentiality.

It is our intent that the case studies will be of use to:

- Current farmers who want access to a greater share of the revenue that comes from the foods they grow and raise and are interested in exploring one or more marketing options.
- New farmers who are designing their production and marketing systems, who are interested in employing one or more marketing strategies, and are establishing a business plan for their farm.
- Educators and other agricultural professionals who work with producers and others interested in direct and semi-direct marketing.
- Policy-makers who are interested in enhancing the financial stability of family farms in the region through innovative policy and government funding.

A total of 12 case studies were produced by Rural Roots, Inc. and the University of Idaho as part of the Northwest Direct project. A list of the other case studies in the series is included at the end of this document. These case studies are one component of a larger USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems project called *Northwest Direct: Improving Markets for Small Farms*. For more information on this project and its outcomes, visit the project website at <http://www.nwdirect.wsu.edu/>.



Colette DePhelps, NW Direct Case Study Research Team Leader



# Measuring Success on the “Urban Fringe:” Meadowlark Farm

## *Farm Overview & History*

To get to Meadowlark Farm, near Nampa, Idaho, one drives about an hour west of Boise, through an unusual mix of city outcropping, suburban sprawl and big-name “box” stores rubbing shoulders with gracefully aging country homesteads and lush valley farmland. It’s a dichotomy into which farmer Janie Burns fits well. Her land is certified organic. She takes advantage of her proximity to a metropolitan center by selling her naturally raised lamb, poultry and eggs directly to urban customers hungry for freshness and quality.

Burns grows asparagus, gourmet greens, turnips, beets, radishes, and haricots verts (gourmet French green beans) in her fields and greenhouses. She develops new products, such as her expanding line of sausages, to keep in step with consumer tastes. Burns also reads *Martha Stewart Living* and *Sunset Magazine*, and various other publications to keep up with the trends. Farming has been a family tradition for generations, and Burns was raised on a row-crop farm in Ontario, Oregon, about

45 minutes northwest of her land. She is committed to preserving the quality of life she holds dear and to improving the agricultural climate and direct marketing opportunities for producers, through her involvement in like-minded organizations. Burns owns 9.5 certified organic acres, plus an additional 40 acres which she leases to her brother for conventional farming.

Burns has had to keep an open mind and be willing to change in order to secure her hard-earned niche. In the late 80s, after receiving a degree in English literature, studying geology and working for several years off the farm, she landed in Murphy, Idaho. She started a market garden in 1989 after friends gave her an extra seed catalog. Burns remembers, “After looking through the seed catalog I had two questions. The first was ‘Why is there so little diversity in the vegetables sold in the supermarket?’ And the second, ‘If chemicals are so necessary to farming, how did we ever eat before them?’”

**Janie Burns**

**Meadowlark Farm**

**Nampa, Idaho**

**Marketing Strategies  
Employed**

Farmer’s Market

Farmer’s Cooperative

**Primary Crops**

Lamb

Poultry

Eggs

**Secondary Crops**

Fruits

Vegetables

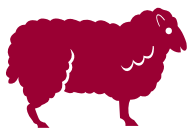
Nursery Plants

Turkeys

**Value Added Products**

Cut Meats

Sausage



**NORTHWEST DIRECT  
MARKETING  
FARMER CASE STUDY**

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Meadowlark Farm’s homestead and contented flock.

Janie Burns moved to her present location in 1991. The farm was christened Meadowlark Farm, a tribute to the number of songbirds in the area, and a name that wouldn't identify the farm with a specific product, giving Burns the freedom to experiment and change. Over time the original quarter acre grew to a half acre and then just kept expanding as Burns planted more vegetables, began producing cut flowers, and introduced livestock. She became one of Idaho's first certified organic producers. During those early years she marketed through farmers markets, sold to restaurants and the local natural foods store, and had a 30 member CSA (Community Supported Agriculture subscription service).

After several years, Burns realized that she wanted to move to a production system that would allow her to level out her seasonal workload, and at the same time afford the freedom to be responsive to changing demands in the marketplace. She met these goals by shifting to "naturally-grown" meat and poultry. This decision met her desire for steady, less intensive, year-round work. In 1999, she took advantage of this opportunity and began shifting the focus of the farm.

The off-farm income, provided by Burns' partner, helped cover household expenses while Burns transitioned from vegetables to livestock. She eliminated her CSA program and cut back on the amount of vegetables that she produced. As she down-

sized her vegetable production, Burns began increasing her sheep flock, which has grown to 70 ewes and 2 rams. She also has 80 free-range laying hens which produce up to 30 eggs per day. Meadowlark Farm produced 90 lambs in 2002, 120 meat chickens, 100 layers, and 20 turkeys. Livestock production also permits Burns to focus her extra time on making southwestern Idaho a better place for small acreage farmers through her participation in several cooperatives and non-profits.

Janie Burns now sells natural meat and eggs almost exclusively at the Capital City Public Market, in Boise. While the transition from vegetables to livestock has improved her quality of life, she warns that it isn't for everyone, saying "Almost anyone can do vegetables, but raising animals is a little bit different. Animals are a year-round responsibility, and not everyone is willing to take on the responsibility for life. I feel like I have a market advantage in that not very many people are willing to do what I do."

Much of Burns' strategy is about knowing the market, and knowing her particular skills and interests. She characterizes farming as "dynamic" work- each year's strategy evolving to meet her needs and the market trends. This flexibility makes Burns feel fortunate. When asked about the intangible benefits of farming, she had the following to say:

"I think as Wes Jackson says, 'Accounting of the intangibles is the next big thing.' I have to believe that... (although)...I am may not be making a lot of money on something...that I am doing the right thing...I wake up every morning being hopeful that I'm helping to do my little part for making a better world....Every person who comes out here is envious of the qualities for which I'm not paid, but (by) which I gather great enjoyment and great fulfillment: my access to fresh air, to being outside, to doing work that gives me physical exercise....Every day I'm doing something that contributes to my health. How does our society measure that?...I wish we could measure those things because farmers...would come out far ahead on those things." Burns says that this is the foundation of who she is.

*"I've always tried to offer products that no one else is growing."*



Janie Burns with two essentials: Martha the herding dog and an old, but reliable tractor.

## Marketing Strategies for Meadowlark Farm

“It is essential to have a farm identity—without it, you’re doomed,” says Burns.

A simple way in which Janie Burns cheaply and effectively markets her farm is through the labeling of her meat and poultry, eggs, value added products, and all farm correspondence. By including her name, logo and contact information on every piece of meat or carton of eggs she sells, her name is effectively placed in the customer’s line of sight. She explains, “I get a lot of calls from people saying that they are down to their last piece of meat and they need more. The most important thing that you can do is have your phone number in someone’s freezer.”

Her primary avenue for sales is the Capital City Public Market, through which 71% of production is channeled. Private sales account for 13% of total production, followed by 9% going to household use and bartering (see Figure 1).

The Idaho Organic Cooperative provides a limited venue for sales, but through her involvement in that organization, plus the Idaho Organic Alliance<sup>1</sup> and the Idaho Pastured Poultry Association, Burns aims to strengthen the market and possibilities for locally grown, organic and natural products.

### Farmers’ Market

When Janie Burns began her first market garden in 1989, she grew a wide variety of vegetables, without chemicals, on a quarter acre of her land, initially wanting to raise enough food to meet the needs of her neighbors.

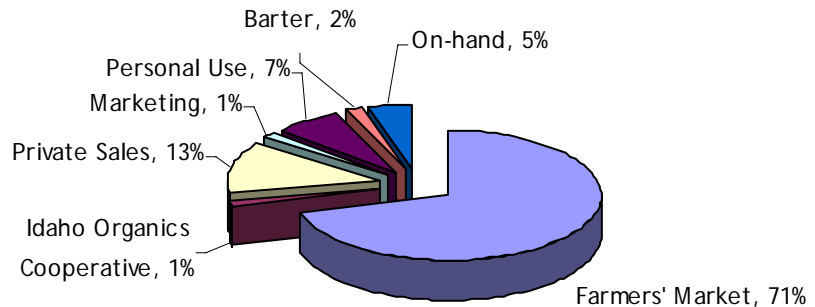
As harvest time approached, Burns suddenly became nervous about how she was going to sell the volume of vegetables she had produced in her small community. Fate intervened. The Downtown Farmers Market in Boise was just beginning its first season. Burns loaded everything into Styrofoam coolers and headed to Boise.

On her first day at the market, Burns sold everything that she brought with her and made \$37 dollars in the process. Burns recalls that she was “thrilled to pieces!”

But it wasn’t just the cash that kept Burns coming back to the market. Customers came back the next weekend and said that her vegetables were the best that they’d ever eaten.

“I was just hooked,” she says, and she has been selling

Figure 1:  
Disbursement of Farm Products



in Boise ever since. Presently, almost all of Meadowlark Farm sales occur at the market, including 75% of all lamb sales, 66% to 69% of all chicken, egg and turkey sales, 52% of sausage and 48% of vegetable sales.

As she has refined her product mix and moved into more animal production, her expectations for a market day’s earnings increased. She says, “I wanted to make \$1000 dollars a day at the Farmers’ market.” It was a reasonable goal given her product mix. However, as Burns points out, “To make \$1000 dollars at the market, you need to bring \$1000 in product. Here I was taking \$500 of product and wondering why it wasn’t generating \$1000 dollars in sales. In addition to that, you have to have a market that will support \$1000 (worth of product sales.) You can’t rely on the kindness of...strangers to guarantee that \$1000. So I’m happy to provide my time and energy to the farmers’ market (serving on boards and committees) to help that market grow.” She thinks this public service aspect of participating in markets is not well understood by farmers.

*“I wanted to make \$1000 dollars a day at the Farmers’ market.”*

For almost every week of the market’s 26 consecutive weeks during late spring, summer and early fall, Burns makes the 30 mile trip from her home in Nampa to the market in Boise. While the market is only open for four hours, she spends another four hours prepping her

<sup>1</sup> In 2005, IOA merged with Rural Roots, and now operates as Rural Roots, Inc.

products, traveling to the market, setting up and taking down her display and returning home.

Time is also spent in consumer education. Burns says, "I do as much as I have time to do. Most people are very unaware of issues, but relate easily if you have time to explain. We all need to do more. I've hosted several farm tours and open houses. These are great opportunities to show people what you do and to explain why things are done a certain way."

There are some costs associated with selling at the farmers' market. In 2002, Meadowlark Farm spent \$703 on market fees. Another significant cost is the money spent on gas and vehicle expenses for the weekly trip to Boise. Other costs such as bags for customers, meals and marketing supplies are marginal.

For pricing, Burns looks to the competition. She says, "I am always checking prices in the grocery stores to ensure that I am higher. I know my production costs. Sometimes the production costs are more than the market will bear for some items. Consumer education helps justify the higher price I must charge."

Of all the elements required to sell successfully at a farmers' market, Burns believes the most important thing is to be a "people" person. She is quick to supply recipes for using her products, make suggestions, and discuss the way her animals are raised.

She explains, "You need to know how to judge people and how to sell and talk to different types of people. I have learned a lot about personal marketing through the farmers' market. My customers tell me where they want the market to go."

A good example of this may be seen in her evolving product line. Recently, Burns was approached by one of her farmers' market customers who had been in the Foreign Service. While abroad, he'd discovered a unique type of spicy sausage called a Merguez, seasoned with cumin and cinnamon and he wondered if Burns could supply a preservative-free, all-lamb version.

Burns decided to develop a product that would meet his needs. She went on-line and looked up several different recipes for a



Janie Burns at the Capital City Public Market

Merguez. She had some test sausage made and invited her friends and customers to an on-farm tasting. She plans to sell this new product not only at the market, but to restaurants and specialty food stores, marketing Merguez as an exclusive product in her area.

### ***Idaho Organic Cooperative***

The IOC is a group of organic producers who have joined forces, combining their crops and distributing them to a widening customer base.

Burns serves as the manager for the IOC and spends a minimum of six hours per week working on its behalf.

"The growers contact me on Sunday... I fax that information to numerous restaurant and caterers that we deal with....They call our voice mail on Tuesday afternoon and...(I send the orders) to the growers on Wednesday morning. (The produce) is (delivered)... Thursday.... And the whole process cycles back," she says.

While the IOC provides little income for Burns' operation, she believes that the

*"I don't do anything that doesn't offer an ulterior motive!"*

organization will be able to develop into an outlet for locally grown produce and serve as a distribution network for area farmers. She knows that much work needs to be done in order to make this vision a reality, but she sees promise in all the volunteer effort being put into this project.

"We are interested in getting into schools. The Vallivue School (in nearby Caldwell, Idaho) is buying from local producers, probably just apples and such, but that is still an opportunity for us to get involved in a larger way. We are looking for ways to sell to more than just restaurants because that is just not cutting it. We are also looking for ways to promote season extension and we are working on that by buying and operating greenhouses and sometimes even getting the funding for that through grants," Burns says.

Sales through the Idaho Organics Cooperative (IOC) accounted for only 1% of the final destination of Meadowlark production in 2002. However, it is a market that Burns is dedicated to developing and promoting. And, in the future, she plans to utilize the IOC as an avenue for farm sales on a larger scale.

### ***Other Off Farm Non-Profit Work***

"I don't do anything that doesn't offer an ulterior motive!" says Burns. She therefore spends a lot of time and energy with her fellow small farmers developing a local vision and opportunities for success.

Burns devotes considerable time to non-profit organizations which focus on the advancement of sustainable agriculture, organic agriculture, and farmer/producer cooperatives. She sees her participation in the Idaho Organic Alliance, Idaho Organic

Cooperative and the Idaho Pastured Poultry Association as a way to open markets for other farmers who share her values of environmental stewardship, survival of rural communities, and the promotion of human and animal health.

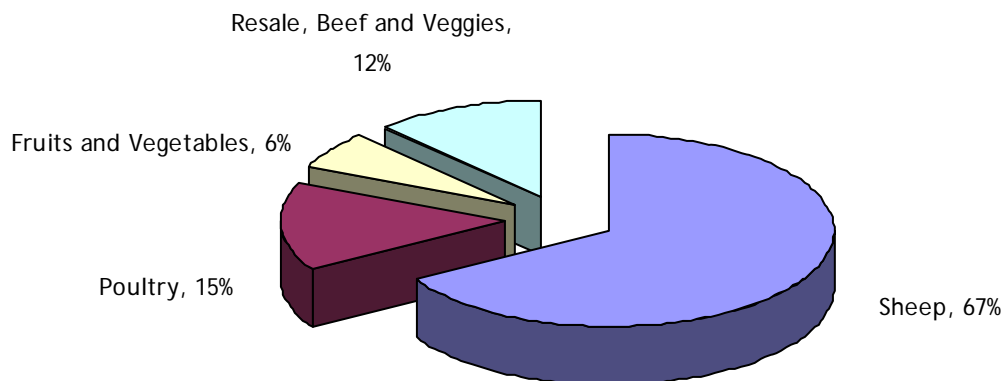
She has served on the board of the Idaho Organic Alliance, is the manager of the IOC, and provides leadership to Idaho Pastured Poultry Association. She believes her involvement in these groups ultimately benefits her farm. For example, the IPPA's primary goal is to secure a processing option for small scale poultry producers in her locality. She explains, "I want to be able to call up a processing place and take my chickens there to get them done, when I want them done. If I need to volunteer my time to help in that endeavor, I'm willing to help."

Currently, processing options for small volumes of birds are limited, and should these operations close their doors, Meadowlark Farm and other small scale producers in the area would be left without a way to process their poultry.

Another goal of the IPPA is to develop a means of producing organic poultry feed in the Treasure Valley/Boise area. She says, "Not only are we interested in developing processing facilities that would be available to us, but also a feed industry that uses Idaho grains."

These organizations also promote the idea of buying locally. Burns believes that generating interest in local products benefits producers and consumers. She says, "I would never want to use fear as a method for selling anything, but I think that the time is right to start emphasizing the food security aspect of having a local food base. I think people are more receptive now than they have ever been."

**Figure 2:  
Share of Value by Enterprise**



## ***Effects of Marketing Strategies on Production and Profitability by Enterprise***

“My personal goals are to eat as well as I possibly can and to enhance my health through both the work and the food,” Burns says.

Burns has been farming at her present location since 1991. The structures on her property include the house, a barn constructed in 1915, two hoophouses, a straw-bale greenhouse, a refrigeration unit and a small packing area. This property isn't large enough to graze her entire sheep herd, so she rotates them on property owned by her neighbors. Those parcels are two and six acres, respectively. She also grazes her sheep on pastureland in Caldwell, at no cost. The grazing is really a trade, as Burns explains, “I provide a weed eating service. There is a tremendous opportunity in this area to offer sheep for that purpose. With this arrangement, everyone wins.”

Meadowlark Farm's five major enterprises include the raising and sale of natural lamb, poultry, eggs, cut meats and sausages, vegetable and fruit. In 2002, the largest component was sheep production, which accounted for 67% of total output (See Figure 2). Following sheep production in out-

put percentages were poultry (15%), resale items, including certified organic beef and some vegetables (12%), and fruit and vegetable production (6%).

While it is clear that Burns' quality of life expectations drive her farming and marketing endeavors, she remains committed to keeping abreast of market trends. “I've always tried to offer products that no one else is growing,” she explains.

Her production methods reflect these aims. For example, all the land Burns owns is certified organic, and so all vegetables produced are certified organic. Her customers appreciate this. However, she is unable to offer certified organic lamb because her grazing rotation utilizes neighboring land that isn't certified organic. As for antibiotics, she uses them sparingly and only on a case by case basis. Selective use of antibiotics and worming also prevents Burns from being a certified organic lamb producer but that doesn't trouble her. She says, “I don't have a problem marketing my lamb. When the market forces me to make those changes I will consider organic lamb production.”

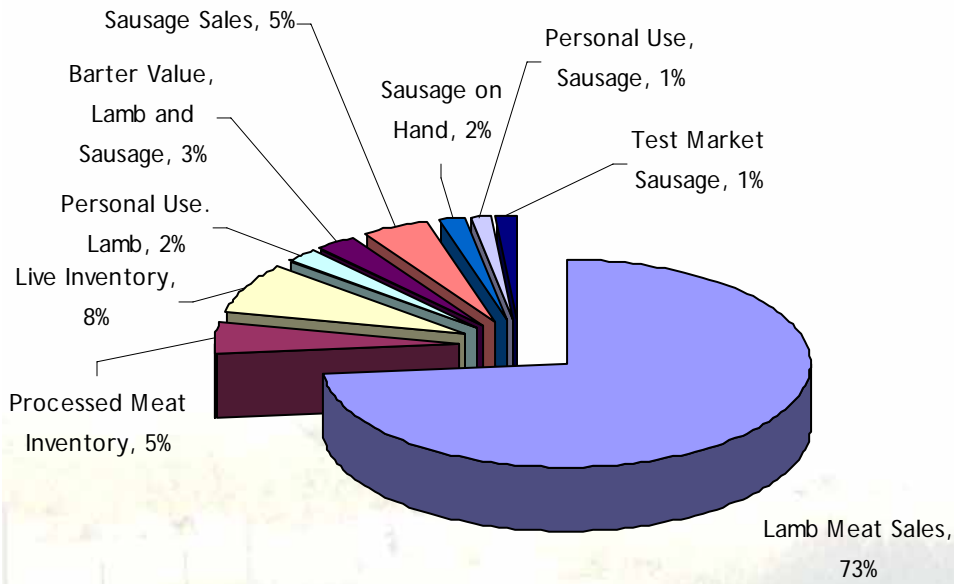
Meadowlark Farm's eggs and poultry are not certified organic because a local feed source is not available. She says, “I could produce “organic free range” poultry if I could just find organic feed, but none is

*“I would never want to use fear as a method for selling anything, but I think that the time is right to start emphasizing the food security aspect of having a local food base. I think people are more receptive now than they have ever been.”*



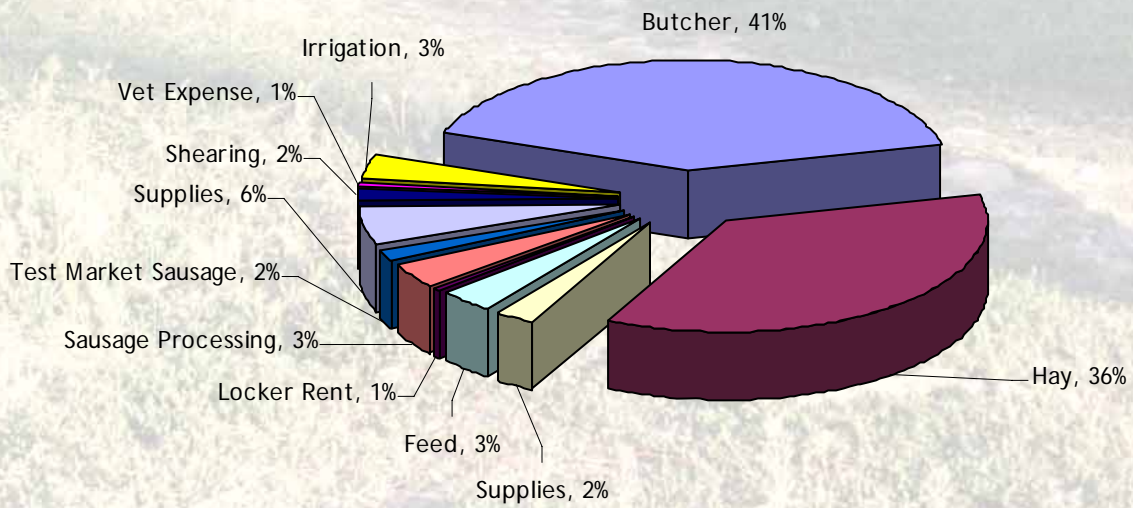
A Meadowlark ewe and lambs keep warm in the early Spring.

**Figure 3: Gross Returns from Sheep Enterprise  
Meadowlark Farm, 2002**



Actual dollar amounts not provided to preserve confidentiality.

**Figure 4: Expenses Associated with Lamb and Sausage Sales  
Meadowlark Farm, 2002**



Actual dollar amounts not provided to preserve confidentiality.

**Table 1: Operational and Production Calendar for Sheep Enterprise Meadowlark Farm, 2002**

Production Phase	Phase of Dates	Number of Weeks	Hours per Week	Total Hours	Duties Associated with Production Phase
Lambing	Dec 1 - May 1	21	4	84	stall preparation, birthing assistance, care of lamb & ewe
Flock feeding & Maintenance	Oct 1 - May 1	30	20	600	feeding, watering, observation, health check
Shearing	May	1	20	20	Sheep handling, sorting, fleece packing
Pasturing	April 15 - Oct 15	26	9.25	240.5	Sheep sorting, transport, watering, irrigation, pasture manage observation
Marketing	April 15-Dec 31	36	5	180	sorting,transport to butcher, pickup and sort meat, farmer's market, delivery to customers
Bookkeeping	Jan 1 - Dec 31	52	1	52	invoices, banking, taxes, records, etc.
<b>Total sheep enterprise</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>22.63</b>	<b>1176.5</b>	

**Table 2: Operational and Production Calendar for Poultry Enterprise Meadowlark Farm, 2002**

Laying flock	Jan 1 - Dec 31	52	3	156	feeding, watering, egg gathering, pen cleaning, egg washing
Laying flock replacements	May 1 - June 31	8	1	8	brooding chicks, pen cleaning, integrating to laying flock
Meat chickens	April 1 - Sept 15	24	2	48	brooding chicks, pen cleaning, move to pasture, watering, feeding, transport to butcher
Turkeys	Jun 25 - Nov 15	21	1	21	brooding poults, watering, feeding,
Poultry marketing	Jan 1 - Dec 31	52	1	52	delivering , selling, farmers market and private delivery
Bookkeeping	Jan 1 - Dec 31	52	0.25	13	invoicing, banking, records
<b>Total poultry enterprise</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>298</b>	

**Table 3: Operational and Production Calendar for Vegetable Enterprise Meadowlark Farm, 2002**

Vegetable field work	Mar 15 - June 15	13	1	13	compost spread, ground workup, seeding, cultivation
Vegetable harvest	Mar 15 - May 1	6	1	6	asparagus harvest, weighing, packing
Vegetable harvest	May 15 - Sept 15	18	6	108	bean and lettuce harvest, weighing, packing
Vegetable marketing	Mar 15 - Sept 15	22	1	22	farmer market sales, private delivery
Bookkeeping	Mar 15 - Sept 15	22	0.25	5.5	invoicing, banking, records
<b>Total vegetable enterprise</b>	<b>Mar 15 - Sept 15</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>154.5</b>	



**Martha the border collie surveys her realm.**

produced in this area...I could bring in organic feed, but my market is simply not demanding it yet.”

Her customers have yet to demand organic poultry, as they are satisfied, for the time being with the “naturally grown” label. However, if a shift in market demand were to occur, having a local feed source in place would be a good idea.

### *Sheep Enterprise*

The sheep enterprise is the primary focus of production at Meadowlark Farm. Within this category, lamb cuts generate 73% of cash sales (See Figure 3) and 91% of total output for sales and household consumption. The remaining 8% of production value of the sheep enterprise is derived from the sale and household consumption of sausage.

Of the total production output, expenses accounted for 85% of that value at the enterprise level. The remaining profit from the enterprise, 15% of the total value of production, goes to paying overhead costs and providing food for the household (See Figure 4).

By selling directly to the consumer, not only does Burns receive much higher returns on her lamb than do conventional producers, she also avoids the fluctuations in market price. In 2000, conventional producers were receiving \$0.77/lb live weight. In 2001, the price dropped over 29% to \$0.54/lb, only to rise back to \$0.73/lb in 2002.

Burns’ operation, in stark contrast, is not affected by the fluctuating price of lamb in the marketplace. Rather, she sets a price for her lamb that is in alignment with her costs as a producer, while also taking into consideration the price her target market is willing to pay. In 2002 her price for lamb cuts averaged \$4.46/lb, which is equivalent to \$1.56/lb live weight. Burns estimates that the total weight in lamb cuts is approximately 35% of the beginning live weight of an average lamb. Her estimate is lower than some producers since she primarily sells boneless cuts. For the 2003 market season, Burns increased the average price of her lamb cuts to \$5.59/lb (\$1.96/lb live weight).

Her herd size for the year ending 2002 was 65 ewes and two rams. For a breakdown of tasks associated with the care of a herd this size, refer to Table 1: Operational and Production Calendar for Sheep Operation. Because Burns rotates her sheep through several fields, her hours devoted to moving and caring for sheep are likely to be higher than they would be for a producer with a larger single acreage.

### *Poultry Enterprise*

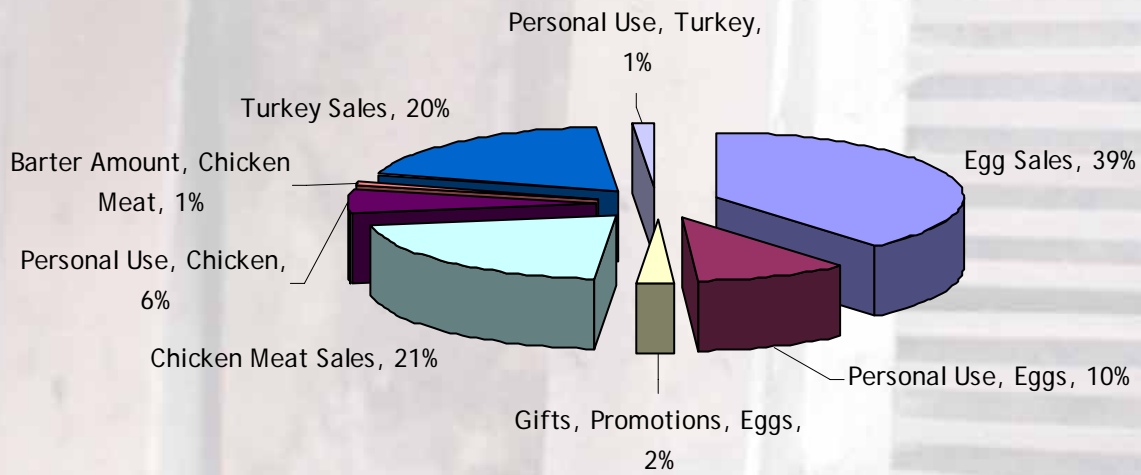
The poultry enterprise is comprised of three specific areas of production; eggs, chicken meat and turkey meat. Eggs account for 51% of the value created by the poultry enterprise (See Figure 5.) Chicken meat follows at 28% and

**B**urns has recently added turkeys to her operation to increase the profitability of her farm without drastically changing the current operation. Reasons for adding turkeys into her operation include:

1. The housing and feeding of different types of poultry are similar and require little additional work or costs. For example, the skills, equipment, and material for constructing a turkey pen are virtually identical to those of chickens. Adding a turkey pen was easy with material she had on hand for chickens.
2. Turkeys consume the same feed as the meat chickens with minor modifications. They utilize pasture much better and are cheaper to raise from that perspective. Using the same feed formulations simplifies the storage and purchasing of feed.
3. There is a market demand for high quality turkeys from an established poultry grower. Anyone can raise and sell a good turkey, but Burns’ reputation for raising eggs and meat chickens predisposes people to think that she can also raise a good turkey. It is Burns’ serious intent and professional approach to adding turkey sales to her poultry enterprise that carries some influence in the marketplace.
4. Most turkeys are consumed at holiday meals and therefore, people are less price sensitive when purchasing them. Raising turkeys can be expensive because of higher initial cost and a generally higher chick mortality rate than chickens, and occasional predation issues unique to turkeys, Burns still manages to make money on them and is able to set a price that will ensure a reasonable profit.

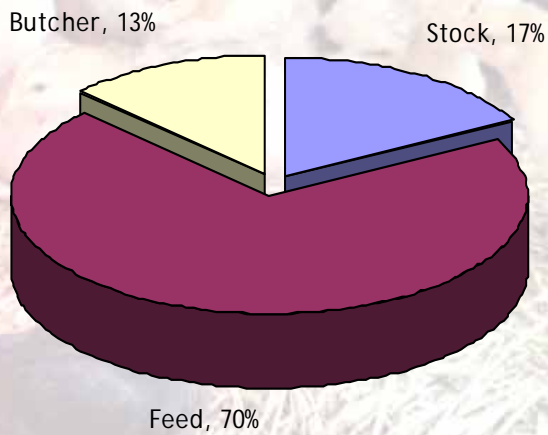


**Figure 5: Poultry Enterprise Value; Cash Income and Personal Use  
Meadowlark Farm, 2002**



Actual dollar amounts not provided to preserve confidentiality.

**Figure 6: Poultry Enterprise Expenses  
Meadowlark Farm, 2002**



Actual dollar amounts not provided to preserve confidentiality.

*“Of all of the things that I have grown there is no product that clearly differentiates itself more than a free range/pastured egg. It is the very finest product you can grow in terms of the environmental and health benefits.”*

turkey meat at 21% of enterprise value.

Within the poultry enterprise, 17% of total production is for household consumption and the remaining 83% sold off farm (See Figure 5.) The most significant cost associated with the enterprise is feed, which accounts for 70% of poultry expenses (See Figure 6.) The poultry enterprise maintained a profit margin of 33% in 2002.

The poultry at Meadowlark Farm is raised and marketed as “free-range pastured poultry.” The birds do most of their laying in a hen house but are otherwise free to roam about the property. Fulfilling the responsibilities associated with raising chickens takes Burns, on average, less than six hours per week. For more information on the responsibilities associated with the poultry operation, refer to Table 2: Operational and Production Calendar for Poultry Enterprise.

Burns sold 99 meat birds in 2002, and approximately 85% of those sales were made at the farmers’ market for convenience. To comply with USDA and Idaho state regulations, she takes orders months in advance, essentially sells her customers a live bird, and then handles the processing for them. She advises her customers before taking their order that she is selling them a live bird, but will charge them on the basis of its dressed weight, which is approximately 75% of the live weight. She charges \$2.50/lb dressed weight for chickens, or approximately \$1.87/lb live weight.

In comparison, producers in the conventional broiler market received an average price \$0.29 to \$0.37/lb live weight from December 2001 to November 2002<sup>2</sup>. Butchering charges are \$1.50 per bird. The average weight of a dressed broiler is three pounds. After the cost of butchering is taken into consideration, Burns is still earning \$2.00 per pound, much more than conventional growers.

In 2002, Janie Burns’ layers produced approximately 600



Laying flock settling in for the night



### Quality of Life at Meadowlark Farm

“My farm goal is to break even. I have no illusions of a big IRA. I would like the farm to pay for itself. The good news is, like most farmers, is that I have off farm income. To think that you can make a real living with one person farming is really difficult. So to have the farm pay for itself and to produce things that benefit the work that I very much enjoy and the good food that I demand is very important to me.

Perhaps I’m deluded in thinking that our world is based on something more than how much money you can make every year, that’s the reality, but maybe some of these recent current events: war with Iraq, terrorism on US soils, etc., are making people take a different look at their lives.

On a lifestyle basis I’m doing the right things, I’m eating well.

Environmentally there are always things that we could do better but I hope to think that based on what I have I’m doing the best that I can.

I hope to be in good health until I’m 90, and I have to think that everything that I do contributes to that. Everyday I’m doing something that contributes to my health. How does our society measure that? It doesn’t. But I measure it. I can’t put it on any balance sheet, but it is important for me to retain physical ability so that when I’m 80 I will continue to enjoy the lifestyle that I’ve chosen.

I wish we could measure those things because farmers, in general, would come out far ahead.”

<sup>2</sup> <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/nassr/price/pap-bb/2002/agpr1202.txt>

dozen eggs, with almost all sales being generated through the Capital City Public Market. At peak production, that's 17 dozen a week. In 2002 she charged \$2.75 per dozen which is almost four times as much as conventional farmers in Idaho received during the same time period. In fact, the average wholesale price paid to a farmer for a dozen eggs in Idaho has steadily dropped from a high of \$.71 in 1996 to \$.58 in 2002.

### ***Secondary Products***

Janie Burns is always looking for ways to increase the profitability of the sheep enterprise. Currently she has 65 ewes which produce lambs for the market. Of those ewes, the ones that fail to conceive or have lambing problems will be culled from the flock. Previously she had been culling these ewes for personal use. But, she felt that the culled ewes had more value than that and started looking at other options, particularly value added products. Sausage seemed a natural solution. Now, a culled ewe is worth over \$110 in specialty sausage.



**Burns has a personal investment in the welfare of each animal**

Burns has dedicated a quarter acre to vegetable production, with the harvest largely for household use. A small fruit orchard is also dedicated for household consumption. To extend the growing season she has several hoophouses that begin producing months earlier. She has received several grants that helped to defray the costs associated with building the structures. Burns also grows vegetable starts for fellow growers in the hoophouses. For a breakdown of tasks associated with vegetable production refer to Table 3: Operational and Production Calendar for Vegetable Enterprise.

When asked about the future of her vegetable production, she says, "My focus has shifted to nutritional vegetables. I'm doing trials on carrots and tomatoes. If you have a carrot with enhanced beta carotene, how does that compare with a variety that I'm more familiar with, and can you offer that carrot as having the same taste qualities that the public will accept? This is a new frontier."

### ***Future of the Farm***

Janie Burns' personal goals are to continue to produce good food for her family, so as to keep herself in good health and able to continue farming. Her goals for the farm are less defined. She says, "(I)t is unrealistic for me to set a 10-year plan. I would become very frustrated. My vision changes with the market. Personality-wise, I get bored very easily, so I'm looking for new variables to come in that challenges me. I really enjoy that."

Regarding expansion of her current livestock enterprise, Burns says, "I'm at the end of my land base for lambs. My hold on property that I don't own is tenuous, and so I can't expand too much. There is lots of opportunity, but it's not a stable opportunity."

Burns sees three major areas into which Meadowlark Farm could expand: selling wool, increasing poultry production and growing organic seed.

First, she would like to do something with her wool. She explains, "I burn, compost and give away the wool. There is a small market for wool, but most of it is coming from China, and China is a big player, and we aren't going to be able to compete with them. The lack of local processing prohibits me from doing anything with wool. I thought about having my fleeces sent to a spinnery in Vermont, and offering yarn at the farmers' market. In looking at all of the fabric stores there is not a 100% wool product, so why shouldn't I look into providing 100% wool at the market?"

Second, she would like to increase the number of meat birds she raises, processes and sells. Burns explains, "As for the chickens, our poultry processor is going out of business and has his equipment for sale. Our cooperative is probably going to buy it and operate it

as a mobile processing unit. The next closest place is Hazelton and the place is fabulous and they do a great job, but it is 150 miles (away).”

The third area of potential growth, organic seed production, stems from new policies requiring organic vegetable producers to use certified organic seed. Burns says, “I am also moving into (limited, small-scale) seed production. To meet the organic seed requirement, NOP (National Organic Program) is driving many of us smaller growers into looking into one crop (for producing) organic seeds.... This will give us insurance from the larger corporate seed producers. So, I will probably do peppers and heirloom tomatoes. I’m not putting in many acres, probably just 50 plants of each. This is providing a new business venture for our cooperative.”

Janie Burns is hopeful, energetic and devoted to the lifestyle she has chosen. She says, “Joel Salatin has a phrase that I like using: ‘the opportunities in agriculture are so great that we can’t sleep at night.’ I feel the very same way. There are so many things that ...I feel that I could be very successful (doing.) I have chosen to focus on just a few. ...I will always try to stay one step ahead.”



*Northwest Direct* is a four year research project funded by the USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems. Northwest Direct’s goal is to evaluate and improve direct marketing systems to increase profitability for small farms in the Pacific Northwest.

This project combines research and extension to:

- document our locally based food system
- develop case studies of direct marketing farmers
- foster the expansion of farmers’ markets
- address regulatory and infrastructure barriers



Northwest Direct is a four-year research project involving the five partners listed below. Our goal is to increase profitability of small farms in the Pacific Northwest through research and extension. We have documented locally based food systems, developed case studies of direct marketing farmers, fostered expansion of farmers markets, and addressed regulatory and infrastructure barriers to direct sales. Northwest Direct is coordinated by Washington State University's Small Farms Program. More information is available at [www.nwdirect.wsu.edu](http://www.nwdirect.wsu.edu).



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