



Joe Cecil (left), CEO of Western Kentucky Farmers' Co-Operative, is enthusiastic about the future of vegetables in the state's farm economy. Operations manager Kevin Grant is at right.

produce through the efforts of 65 growers in seven counties (including some growers from Indiana and Illinois).

Producers in this co-op grow sweet corn, bell peppers, hot peppers, squash, zucchini, potatoes, tomatoes, pumpkins, cabbage, broccoli and cucumbers. Members pay annual dues and are required to purchase a share of co-op ownership.

Sales are based on daily fresh market prices. Farmers pay packaging time, labor, and a 14 percent commission to the co-op.

Potential for net per-acre revenues for vegetables can exceed tobacco's potential. Producers can net up to \$2,500 per acre on some vegetable crops, as opposed to \$750 to \$800 per acre for tobacco, estimates Joe Cecil, Western Kentucky co-op CEO.

On the downside compared to tobacco, vegetables pose a far greater risk; prices fluctuate more with vegetables than tobacco; and the initial investment in some vegetable crops can be as high as \$2,000 per acre.

similar calves cooperatively, resulting in better prices. Sellers certify that certain health-promoting procedures have been followed.

In the latest season of CPH sales in Kentucky, more than 35,000 head of beef cattle have been marketed.

Producers sign agreements in January of each year that commit a predetermined amount of produce to be marketed through the co-op.

**The Green River Produce Marketing Cooperative** in Horse Cave shipped produce to 20 states in 2003.

**The Kentucky Produce and Aquaculture Alliance**

## Vegetable co-ops

Kentucky's marketing cooperatives have continued to grow, a very good sign that KDA is succeeding in its mission to strengthen agricultural marketing channels.

KDA has supported with funding and expertise the efforts of **four vegetable growers' co-ops** across the state, helping their local farmers develop successors to tobacco as a staple crop. Members of the **West Kentucky Growers Co-Operative** in Owensboro are now growing 1,400 acres of



Loss due to harsh weather is part of every farmer's story, but the winter of 2002-2003 proved exceptionally harsh. An ice storm that struck the Bluegrass region in mid-February caused hardship and losses among livestock, and deprived farmers of the electricity needed for vital operations.