

## **The “Buy CT Grown” Farmers’ Market Resource Center--Building Market Vibrancy and Sustainability through Statewide Collaboration**

**CitySeed, Inc.** of New Haven, CT received \$42,369 to: 1) assist all consumers, including low income and seniors, with access to safe, locally produced food, 2) to improve sales of local farmers and 3) increase the skills of farmers and market managers. Funds were used to promote and implement EBT systems at two farmers markets, train managers and vendors at conferences and offer individual advice and training to 75 markets and 150 farms.

### **Final Report**



**The buyCTgrown Farmers' Market Resource Center:  
Building Market Vibrancy and Sustainability through Statewide Collaboration**

Grant: G-0697 Period: October 2008 – June 2010

Grant Amount: \$42,369

FINAL REPORT

With Farmers' Market Promotion Program funding, CitySeed developed a Farmers' Market Resource Center housed on the [www.buyCTgrown.com](http://www.buyCTgrown.com) website, a Farmers' Market Forum, and a report: SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut. The goals of this project were to provide farmers' market managers with the information and support necessary to start new markets, enhance and further develop existing markets, and provide farmers and other producers with the resources to better identify potential market-selling opportunities.

**® Summary of Issue or Problem**

**Survey of Farmers' Market Managers**

During the grant period, we worked closely with key partners from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, Working Lands Alliance/American Farmland Trust, CT Northeast Organic Farming Association, and the CT Farm Bureau Association (the Executive Committee of the buyCTgrown program). In speaking with them and consultant Jim Hafner, we created a survey that was distributed to all market managers in the state of Connecticut. In this survey, market managers identified four main challenges for farmers' markets in Connecticut:

- 1) Regulations and Food Assistance Benefits  
Structure for SNAP/EBT, WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), new WIC Fruit and Vegetable Checks, insurance and food sampling
- 2) Marketing
- 3) Creating a Market and its Structure  
Determining feasibility, guidelines and governance

#### 4) Volunteers and Staffing

Paying for staff, recruiting volunteers and keeping them engaged

This feedback helped us craft a more effective plan for use of the funds provided by FMPP.

### **® Description of How Issue was Addressed**

#### **Farmers' Market Forum**

The challenges above were the featured topics at the first annual Farmers' Market Forum hosted on January 29, 2010 by CitySeed and the CT Department of Agriculture, with key support from the buyCTgrown Executive Committee. Our intent was to get the conversations going between market managers, farmers and other stakeholders around the state, while respecting the market managers' desire to keep physical gatherings to a minimum (as indicated by survey results).

The Farmers' Market Forum included presentations by the CT Departments of Agriculture and Social Services on the new WIC Fruit and Vegetable Checks, and a keynote address by Greenmarket, a project of GrowNYC. Technical assistance was provided to market managers and farmers through roundtable discussions on: Regulations and Food Assistance Benefits, Marketing, Creating a Market and its Structure, and Volunteers and Staffing Market Management.

The Farmers' Market Forum was a huge success and we hope to find funding to conduct another gathering next year.

#### **Farmers' Market Resource Center (FMRC)**

The purpose of this resource center, housed on the [www.buyCTgrown.com](http://www.buyCTgrown.com) website, is to share best practices as identified by Connecticut farmers' market managers and many other resources around the country. CT market managers identified many of these best practices during the Farmers' Market Forum and also provided us with their own market documents, including:

- Market guidelines
- Vendor applications
- Vendor policies (conflict resolution, etc.)
- Health Department rules or regulations enforced at the market
- Volunteer forms and surveys
- Lists of chefs, musicians, performance artists
- Volunteer policies and roles
- Market photos
- Sample newsletters, publicity materials, other print materials
- Ideas for greening the market (recycling, composting, plastic bag use, etc.)
- List of factors used to measure market feasibility and sustainability

The Farmers' Market Resource Center is now available at [www.buyCTgrown.com/marketmanagers](http://www.buyCTgrown.com/marketmanagers). This site will continue to change and evolve as needed and

recommended by CT market managers. Right now, it contains the following information:

- A Snapshot of the Current Farmers' Market Season
- So You Want to Start a Market...
- Guidelines and Policies
- Marketing and Promotions
- EBT/SNAP
- Paid Staff and Volunteers
- Director of Chefs for Cooking Demos, Musicians and Other Performers
- Insurance

The resource center also links to the Farmers' Market Online Forum, where market managers can post questions and answers on a variety of topics related to farmers' markets.

### **SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut**

We identified four farmers' market managers in Connecticut (including CitySeed's own, Rachel Berg) that have programs at their market(s) for accepting SNAP/EBT. These markets submitted "case study" reports to CitySeed detailing the following information:

- Market location(s), market management type (volunteer or paid)
- Brief history of the market(s) and community demographics
- History of SNAP/EBT at farmers' market(s)
  - Redemption start date
  - Mechanism used for redemption (wired or wireless terminal)
  - Terminal service provider
  - How data is tracked
  - What advertising strategies are used
  - Who corresponds with CT Department of Social Services and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service
- Annual SNAP redemption data
- Future plans for SNAP redemption at market(s), including future strategies for increasing redemption rates

We analyzed these case studies for best practices, common mistakes and innovative programming. The final report is a broad overview of Connecticut farmers' markets and an in-depth look at the SNAP programs at these four markets. If these markets are any indication, Connecticut farmers' markets have found creative and productive ways of accepting and promoting SNAP at their markets! At the same time, they are struggling with similar issues, namely marketing and technology. Our recommendations, as a result of this study, are:

1. To create a unified, statewide marketing campaign letting SNAP clients know which farmers' markets accept EBT, and
2. To encourage farmers' markets managers to share best practices and information on their relationships with Third Party Processors, so that all farmers' markets in our state can avoid typically pitfalls.

We believe that the Farmers' Market Resource Center can serve as an online gathering place and an invaluable tool in realizing the two recommendations above.

## ® Specific Contributions of Project Partners

### Planning

A number of organizations helped us plan for the Farmers' Market Forum and the Farmers' Market Resource Center. The buyCTgrown Executive Committee (listed below) met on several occasions to put together a dynamite agenda and helped us determine the goals and purpose of the event and online resource.

- CT Department of Agriculture
- CT Farm Bureau Association
- CT Northeast Organic Farming Association
- Working Lands Alliance / American Farmland Trust

### Outreach

The CT Department of Agriculture worked closely with us to reach out to farmers' market managers and farmers with a vested interest in successful farmers' markets. Their connections were invaluable throughout the entirety of the grant period.

### Technical Assistance

In addition to bringing farmers' market managers together to discuss their successes and challenges, we wanted to provide them with technical assistance from farmers' market experts. The list of people below represents some of the great minds that came together to help market managers at the Farmers' Market Forum.

- CT Department of Social Services
- CT Department of Agriculture
- Chip Dahlke
- Chris Heitmann
- Winter Caplanson
- Kay Carroll
- Mark Gauger
- Liz Carollo, Publicity Coordinator, Greenmarket, GrowNYC

### Content Creation

We knew our efforts needed to live on beyond the prescribed time of this grant. Consequently, we wanted the content we created through this grant to be top notch and useful far into the future. The following partners helped us with the Farmers' Market Resource Center and the report, *SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut*.

- Survey respondents
- Jim Hafner, Consultant
- Jiff Martin, Consultant
- City Farmers' Markets, New Haven
- Billings Forge Farmers' Market, Hartford
- North End Farmers' Market, Middletown
- Farmers' Market on The Green, Waterbury
- Kristin Krawetzky, CT Department of Social Services
- CitySeed staff and interns

## **Web and Print Materials**

Like the content for the Farmers' Market Resource Center and the report, *SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut*, the web and print materials also needed to be amazing. This was done with the help of the following people:

- Marco Virgili, Design Consultant
- Eudald Lerga, Digital Ecologies
- Max Saltonstall, Web Development Consultant

## **® Results, Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

### **Survey**

We learned early on from the survey we conducted of farmers' market managers that people want to get together once per year for a big event. This helps them build relationships, talk about their successes and concerns, and learn from others. Beyond those one-time gatherings, it is hard to entice people away from their regular work. They definitely do not want to come together in small, formal groups. They made clear through the survey that the preference was email and web-based communications.

### **Farmers' Market Forum**

Consequently, we put together one amazing gathering. By collaborating with the CT Department of Agriculture, we ensured that people would attend because they were getting a lot of information in one day. The packed schedule made it well worth their travel time. People also can be roused for an amazing meal, as was provided by Dinners at the Farm.

Going forward, we would like to figure out a way to host a Farmers' Market Forum on an annual basis. The interest is there and the results of getting everyone together are promising. A lot of great relationships were formed, which will be helpful long into the future.

### **Farmers' Market Resource Center**

The Farmers' Market Resource Center is an exciting development for Connecticut, but its ultimate use will be dependent on the needs of market managers. We anticipate this resource will evolve over time and look forward to its upkeep.

### **SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut**

This report was, by far, the most illuminating of the projects we conducted during the grant period. We learned that most farmers' markets are dealing with the same issues—lack of marketing dollars to promote their SNAP programs and problems with the Third Party Providers that service their wireless EBT machines.

We have concluded that a unified, statewide effort to market SNAP programs is needed. This effort could be handled in a number of different ways—through advertising on buses and on billboards, through literature mailed to SNAP clients from the Department of Social Services, or through literature from the Department of Agriculture.

More importantly, we recommend that some efforts be made on a national level to

deal with the technological constraints imposed by Third Party Processors that service EBT machines. Most of these companies require 36 month contracts, they are not all set up to accommodate farmers' markets, and some are plain incompetent. We highly recommend that the USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program work with a couple of companies to identify preferred companies that are willing to develop farmers' market-specific programs. Without this assistance, no amount of money for EBT machines will help farmers' market managers master the use of EBT machines at their markets. Consequently, many markets will be forced to continue to limit their SNAP programs.

#### **® Current or Future Benefits to be Derived from Project**

The Farmers' Market Resource Center, as well as *SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut* will prove to be useful long into the future. These key pieces of this grant period will help CitySeed and the buyCTgrown program continue to work on efforts to improve upon farmers' markets in Connecticut.

#### **® Additional Information Available**

N/A

#### **® Recommendations for Future Research Needed**

As mentioned above, we believe strongly that the USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program should seek to identify preferred Third Party Processors that service wireless EBT terminals so that farmers' market managers are able to focus on implementing great SNAP programs at their markets, rather than spend their time worrying about legal fights over service.

#### **® Contact Information**

CitySeed  
817 Grand Avenue, No. 101  
New Haven, CT 06511  
t (203) 773-3736  
f (203) 772-2749  
[www.cityseed.org](http://www.cityseed.org)  
Erin Wirpsa Eisenberg, Executive Director  
Nicole Berube, Program Director

#### **® Description of People, Organizations, Marketing Entities and/or Communities that Benefitted from Project**

This project benefitted farmers, farmers' market managers, and SNAP recipients throughout the state of Connecticut.

#### **® Attachments**

- Invitation to Farmers' Market Forum

- Agenda for Farmers' Market Forum
- Current content on Farmers' Market Resource Center
- Farmers' Market Resource Center postcard
- *SNAP at Farmers' Markets: Four Case Studies from Connecticut*
- Final reimbursement request with documentation
- Final financial report with documentation

CitySeed Inc. 817 Grand Avenue, No. 101 New Haven, CT 06511  
tel 203.773.3736 fax 203.772.2749 [www.cityseed.org](http://www.cityseed.org)