

Billings Forge Community Works, Inc., of Hartford, CT received \$46,704 to promote an existing EBT program and a winter market, by extending the farmers' selling season, jointly developing an advertising campaign, and tracking data and results.

[Final Report FY10](#)

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Billings Forge Community Works

Expanding Farmers Market Opportunities and sales in Hartford, CT

Grant #: 12-25-G-1138

140 Russ St. N110

Hartford, Connecticut, 06106

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Final Report

Project Summary:

Within the setting of one of the poorest neighborhoods in Hartford, CT, the Billings Forge Farmers' Market was developed to support an interlocking system of programs to promote food security, provide healthy food choices, create employment, and draw investment to the Frog Hollow neighborhood.

This project was aimed at increasing the market for direct producer-to-consumer sales at farmers' markets in Hartford, CT by increasing traffic to the target markets and by encouraging federal nutrition benefit clients to shop at the winter Billings Forge Market as well as summer markets in the city. The project was a means of keeping food dollars circulating within the regional economy rather than sending them to international food producers and manufacturers. The goal was to increase sales at markets in Hartford so that all people, regardless of economic status, have access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown produce directly from farmers.

Project Approach:

There were a few stages of work for this project, to further address these issues of food access and security, including 1) Billings Forge Winter Market promotion; 2) convening Hartford Farmers' market stakeholders and market masters to develop culturally appropriate marketing materials; 3) implementing a marketing strategy to promote markets with a special emphasis on federal nutrition benefit clients in Hartford; and 4) conducting comprehensive project evaluation.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The marketing and promotional aspects of the project were executed in a variety of ways. With the help of a consulting firm, we strategically outlined the advertising avenues which we would explore and created an integrated website which now services all of the Hartford Farmers' Markets. This strategy included the design and printing of new branded Hartford Farmers' Market posters, three bus ad campaigns (two summer, one winter) featuring the newly branded design, a radio ad



campaign, bilingual bookmarks which listed all market times and locations in both English and Spanish, A-frame signs to be displayed at all markets, as well as additional flyers to promote the Billings Forge Winter Market. In addition, Billings Forge partnered with the Hartford Public Library and local youth artists to create a community mural project that highlighted each market in Hartford.

In addition to Billings Forge Market specific and citywide marketing, stakeholders from each of the Hartford markets formed a coalition which helped to drive some decision making about the role and collaboration of these markets. This committee also helped to organize two annual Harvest Markets; each took place the weekend before Thanksgiving and featured over 20 vendors and hundreds of patrons.

Quantitative results:

- Increase in the number of farmers at the winter market
- Increase in total number of EBT and DVCP purchases
- Increase in the number of Hartford farmers' markets from 5 to 7
- Creation of an annual Harvest Market



Beneficiaries:

Farmers have benefitted from the increased promotion as well as an increase in the number of opportunities to sell their product. We increased self-employment income for four farmers by increasing sales by 218% between 2011-2012. Despite the difficulty of winter markets due to limited product availability, farmers found the market profitable and worth their time and effort. Anecdotally, it became very clear to us how difficult the winter months can be for local farmers. Several of them asked for weekly reimbursement rather than our monthly reimbursement of EBT sales, telling us that the small income they were making at our weekly market was extremely significant. With the addition of two markets as well as the larger scale Harvest market, farmers have been able to offer more product to a wider audience of people. These efforts have also helped to strengthen the consistency of vendors at the Billings Forge Market

Low-income customers (defined as those who paid with SNAP/EBT, WIC, or other nutrition benefit) increased from 14% to 58% and benefit from an increased variety of vendors and purchasable products. In addition, federal nutrition benefits program recipients can also now use their benefits at an additional Hartford market.

Each of Hartford's farmers markets have benefitted from increased promotion and collaboration. Now more uniformly branded, the markets work more collectively to advertise and promote awareness about when and how to access fresh, local food. This coalition has also garnered the support of the city and other food related organizations

which have helped to sponsor the Harvest Market and host other information pertaining to farmers markets in Hartford.

Lessons Learned:

We did face a few challenges over the course of this project, but they provided opportunities for greater clarity. A staffing transition proved to be a chance to look closely at staffing and ancillary programming, and to help a partner organization, Hartford Food System, maintain its staff person. We also realized that there were a number of staffing constraints that often limited the ability for other markets to effectively collect data. After a full assessment of our market, it was clear that we were subsidizing up to \$35,000 per year for a full time staff person, so we opted to change the position to a paid AmeriCorps volunteer. This was also an opportunity for us to strengthen our data collection system which now more efficiently and consistently tracks the number of EBT sales as well as new customers, federal benefits redemption rates, the number of people attending the market, and vendor sales. It also became apparent, that without these systems in place, it was relatively premature to bring a bilingual-intern on board who only had access to limited data collection tools.

What became clear this year through our evaluative work is that the market is a significant asset for the residents who are able to double their food assistance dollars. However, what also became clear is that it is highly unlikely that the summer or the winter market will be self-sustaining. We believe we'll have to raise at least \$30,000 in grants to break even with the two markets unless we can identify other ways to increase revenue. At a recent gathering of urban market managers from around the country, we realize we are not alone in trying to solve this problem. Access to healthy food is a critical need in neighborhoods such as Frog Hollow, but the administration of a market simply costs more than farmers are able to provide in vendor fees. We will continue to identify ways to increase revenue and keep the market viable.

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