FY 2012 – DC Greens, Inc.

$94,150 to DC Greens, Inc., Washington, DC, to: 1) increase customer participation at 4 farmers markets; and 2) reach low income and Federal nutrition benefit recipients in the market neighborhoods, with a targeted outreach into neighboring communities, direct mailings, cooking demonstrations, and improved market signage, resulting in better health for market patrons and an increase in sales for 40 farmers.

Final Report

Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report
For the Period of October 1, 2012 – September 30, 2014

Date:	*30-Oct-14*
Recipient Name:	*DC Greens*
Project Title:	*Community Outreach to Increase SNAP and WIC Redemption and Overall Sales at Four Farmers' Markets in Washington, D.C. with Existing EBT*
Grant Number:	12-25-G-1542
Project Location:	*Washington, DC*
Year of Grant Award:	*2012*
Amount Awarded:	*$94,150*
Contact:	*Lillie Rosen, 202-735-3393, lillie@dcgreens.org*

Program Summary:

In September 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA AMS) awarded DC Greens a grant of $94,150 to implement a farmers' market outreach program directed at increasing revenue for 40 farmers at 4 farmers' markets in the District of Columbia (D.C.). Through a combination of qualitative research, direct consumer outreach, and citywide collaboration, DC Greens successfully brought over 15,000 low-income, D.C. residents to more than 40 farmers' markets across all 8 Wards of D.C. who spent over $150,000 in federal, local, and private farmers' market nutrition incentive program funds.

Activities:

1) Qualitative research to develop culturally appropriate materials aimed at the federal nutrition benefit recipient population neighboring the markets:
a. Three types of materials (postcards, posters, and brochures) were developed in the first program year. These were later whittled down to two brochures (a general market brochure and one specific to Produce Plus) and one farmers' market map poster in the second year; and
b. Federal benefit recipients were surveyed twice a year to determine what language (e.g. "Food Stamps" vs. "SNAP" and "Food Stamps" vs. "Federal Benefits") was most salient, which colors to use (warm colors: reds and oranges), and which materials were most effective (e.g. postcards vs. brochures).

2) Implementation of a marketing and outreach plan designed to reach the target population:
a. Developed relationships with service providers at health and WIC clinics, senior and community centers, and with schools, churches, health insurance providers, farmers' market managers, and dietetic professionals;
b. Led market tours at farmers' markets in Wards 1, 5, 7, and 8;
c. Completed presentations at service sites and tabled at health and wellness events across the city;
d. Collected and analyzed market redemption and incentive distribution data; and
e. Led outreach to local decision makers and funders to encourage support for local farmers' market nutrition incentive programs.

Accomplishments:

1) Developed effective materials

With input from community members and service providers, we created branded, bilingual (English and Spanish) marketing materials promoting use of federal benefits (e.g. SNAP, WIC, and Senior FMNP) at local farmers' markets.

In the first program year we focused our efforts on increasing farmer revenue at 4 partner markets with a particular focus on spending by customers who were also federal nutrition assistance beneficiaries. During that year, spending by Senior and SNAP recipients increased by 16.82% in the 2013 summer season (April-September) compared to the 2012 summer season and by 45.41% in the 2013 winter season (October-March) compared to the 2012 winter season.

At the end of 2013 we surveyed market customers about our materials and identified one key change for 2014, to discontinue our outreach postcards in favor of tri-fold brochures. Customers responded to written and verbal surveys at service sites and markets that the brochures were easier to carry around and to understand. In the second year our project objectives expanded to include completing outreach citywide in response to implementation of the city's new Produce Plus Program. We completed verbal surveys with customers at farmers' markets, service sites, and health clinics to develop a new tri-fold brochure specific to Produce Plus and changed target language across all of our materials. Community member respondents were emphatic that the materials not advertise "Use Your [fill in benefit] at DC Farmers' Markets" (e.g. "SNAP", "Food Stamps", "WIC", or "Senior checks") in "large, loud" letters and instead identified "Use Your Federal Benefits at DC Farmers' Markets" as preferred language for outreach materials. Both tri-fold brochures were developed in English and Spanish. The poster was only in English.

In both years, by providing a branded set of promotional materials with information about all markets in the city and applicable to all federal benefit recipients we were able to reach the greatest number of potential customers. The materials make it easy for federal benefit recipients to locate the farmers' market(s) most accessible to them.

Finally, using feedback from SNAP, WIC, Senior, and health service providers we were able to develop a "Community Food Guide" template that will focus on fresh, produce access at farmers' markets on a Ward-level. The citywide map poster was such a hit that service providers requested a Ward-level version for the 2015 farmers' market season.

The process we went through to solicit community input on our outreach materials makes us confident in using them well into the future. To make the materials we worked with both local and non-local design companies who left us with file types (InDesign and Illustrator) that are easy for us to update and edit as is necessary.

2) Built lasting relationships across the food system in D.C.

This grant enabled DC Greens to build strong relationships with organizations across the food system, including farmers' markets, health clinics, WIC clinics, public and charter schools, churches, food pantries, senior centers, and health insurance providers, amongst others. This grant was transformative in allowing us to slowly develop new and expand existing relationships with all types of nonprofit, for profit, and community organizations. Through this grant we developed over 75 new partners and became known by organizations throughout the city as a resource for farmers' market information. For the duration of the grant we hired two part-time Outreach Coordinators who were able to spend the time necessary to get to know individual service providers and provide specialized outreach to each site (e.g. small presentation, large presentation, presentation with a cooking demo, and/or materials drops depending on the site needs).

At the end of the grant period, DC Greens became a co-convener of the DC Farmers' Market Collaborative with D.C. Hunger Solutions. In this capacity we are able to continue the work initially started under both this FMPP

grant and earlier FMPP grants awarded to D.C. (e.g. D.C. Hunger Solution's "Implementing EBT at Washington, D.C. farmers' Markets" project, 2007-2009).

3) Successful outreach to local decision makers to fund a farmers' market nutrition incentive program
Over the course of this FMPP grant DC Greens, in partnership with members of the DC Farmers' Market Collaborative, successfully lobbied D.C. City Council for local nutrition incentive dollars to be added into the District budget. Kicked off as a pilot in 2013, the Produce Plus Program now has an annual budget of at least $150,000 for direct-to-consumer farmers' market nutrition incentive funds. D.C. residents who receive SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, Senior FMNP, TANF, or SSI disability are eligible to receive $10 per family/per market/per week to spend on fresh produce at farmers' markets. Initial analysis of the 2014 season saw an increase in SNAP spending at farmers' markets across the city that also had other bonus programs compared to the same time period in 2013 (June – September).

Beneficiaries:

1) Low-income District residents: Low-income District residents benefited from this grant by gaining greater knowledge of where to access fresh fruit and vegetables in D.C. at farmers' markets. Additionally, the residents we reached developed a better understanding of the variety of incentive programs available at farmers' markets across the city, including doubling and matching programs. Through partnerships with the city's SNAP educators, local university dietetic programs, and local chefs, residents also learned about the health benefits of eating fresh, seasonal produce.

2) Local Farmers: Local farmers benefited from this grant through increased revenue. Outreach efforts under this grant helped to infuse an additional $150,000 into the local farm economy. Additionally, the Produce Plus Program encouraged some farmers, who had previously been hesitant to accept federal benefits, to begin accepting WIC FMNP, WIC CVC, and Senior FMNP checks.

3) D.C. Farmers' Markets: D.C. farmers' markets benefited from the outreach and marketing completed under this grant. This grant allowed DC Greens to work with markets in all parts of the city by providing outreach materials and presentations to District residents and connecting those residents to their neighborhood market. D.C. farmers' markets also benefited from this grant because it built a collective perspective on outreach to low-income residents through the DC Farmers' Market Collaborative.

4) Service sites: Service sites in D.C. benefited from this grant through support in delivering information on accessing fresh produce at farmers' markets to their clients. Through this grant DC Greens learned how overwhelmed service providers are with information to share with their clients. Being able to make presentations and do materials drops at service sites helped to alleviate the burden on service providers to share accurate information about accessing farmers' markets using federal benefits. Additionally, service sites benefited through on-site cooking demonstrations that provided nutrition education to their clients, another topic that service providers are not always able to adequately offer.

Lessons Learned:

1. Language matters. Of course we knew the importance of language before we started down the path of this grant, but working with community members during the grant period reinforced for us just how important it is. In the first project year all of our conversations with community members reflected that the "right" language to use was "Food Stamps" in large, bold, red letters. In the second year we identified more open-ended questions to ask low-income, market customers. Based on the responses the language on our outreach materials now uses the words "Federal Benefits". In the second year we saw the tri-fold brochures being used in public, at service centers, and at farmers' markets much more regularly.

2. Provide access with education. The most successful outreach activities we did paired food education (e.g. cooking demonstrations, nutrition education) with food access (e.g. explaining how and where to use federal benefits at farmers' markets, market tours). Further we learned that while people felt comfortable taking and using our materials around the city, the materials did not necessarily stand on their own. In their end of project meeting our Outreach Coordinators let us know that the tri-fold brochures were most useful to low-income residents when paired with either a one-on-one conversation about the brochure or as a part of a large group, interactive presentation. Our Outreach Coordinators found that making quizzes, bingo games, or role-play activities were the most effective tools in their presentations.

3. Collective messaging benefits consumers. This grant provided a way for DC Greens to set a clear path to synchronize farmers' market outreach across the city. We were able to demonstrate during our two-year grant how useful for consumers one piece of marketing material that covers food access programs at markets across the city is. The farmers' market map poster and tri-fold brochures allow consumers to find farmers' markets that are close to wherever shopping is most convenient to them (e.g. their homes, places of work, friends, places of worship, etc.).