

Buy Local Florida -- Phase 2

Florida Association of Community Farmers Markets, Inc. of Gainesville, FL, received \$59,317 to conduct a series of organizational workshops to expand the “Buy Local Florida” campaign to eight new target regions.

Final Report



Florida Association of Community Farmers Markets FMPP Project: Buy Local Florida-Phase 2



Final Project Report

The Board of Directors of the Florida Association of Community Farmers Markets, Inc. is pleased to submit our Final Project Report for our FMPP project, “Buy Local Florida - Phase 2.”

A. Summary of issue or problem being examined

In 2006, the Florida Association of Community Farmers’ Markets (FACFM) was awarded a grant under the Farmers Markets Promotion Program to implement the Buy Local Florida project. Through this project, FACFM sponsored workshops in eight Florida regions to help set up new farmers’ markets and to help bring growers to market. FACFM also implemented consumer outreach and awareness activities to make residents of the eight target regions aware of the many benefits of buying locally grown food and the availability of locally grown food at the regions’ farmers markets. FACFM also sponsored a statewide meeting of growers, market managers, consumers and other stakeholders to come to consensus about what “buying local” means for Florida and to identify strategies to support the Buy Local concept.

During implementation of Phase 1 of the Buy Local Florida program, we identified a number of **organizational development needs that FACFM would have to address if the association hoped to improve its effectiveness as an advocate and resource for Florida’s growers, markets and consumers.** FACFM needed to build its capacity and sustainability through the implementation of best nonprofit management practices, sound strategic planning and ongoing governance education for our volunteer Board of Directors. FACFM needed to improve its outreach abilities in order to connect with its constituency in all corners of our large and diverse state. In order for all regions of the state to be represented in FACFM planning, FACFM needed to ensure that all Board members could attend Board meetings and trainings by leveraging new technology for online meetings, trainings and conferences.



In addition, the Buy Local Florida - Phase 2 project would allow FACFM to build on the success of the Phase 1 program by expanding outreach to new regions, where **farmers market awareness and outreach to small growers was still lagging behind**. By promoting the Buy Local Florida message through targeted radio marketing, press releases and feature stories, the Phase 2 project would help to link consumers to local growers through Florida's vibrant farmers market network.



B. Description of how the issue or problem was addressed

To address our organizational development objectives, we implemented the following strategies:

- **Board training and technical assistance:** Our training and technical assistance contractor, Nonprofit Management Consulting LLC (NPMC), provided four board training workshops on the topics of: nonprofit governance responsibilities; fiscal oversight and budgeting; human resource and volunteer management; and organizational evaluation and assessment. In addition, NPMC provided ongoing technical assistance and support to board members and staff in the area of fiscal and grants administration.
- **Strategic planning:** In July of 2009 we held a full-day strategic planning workshop in conjunction with the University of Florida/IFAS Small Farms Conference in Kissimmee. This date and venue were selected to allow the maximum number of stakeholders – farmers, market managers, consumers, technical assistance providers and state policymakers – to attend and participate as FACFM plotted its course for the next five years. Facilitated by NPMC, the workshop gave participants an opportunity to assess the needs of farmers, markets, consumers and the FACFM organization, brainstorm on strategies to address needs, and define goals and objectives. Workshop outcomes formed the basis of FACFM's ongoing short- and long-term strategic planning process.
- **Applied for 501(c)(3) status:** FACFM submitted our Form 1023 Application for Tax Exempt Status to the Internal Revenue Service in late 2008. This initiated a frustrating and draining year-long process of denials, appeals, amendments and resubmissions as we struggled to convince the IRS that FACFM met the definition of a public charity in order to qualify for 501(c)(3) status. Unfortunately, like most state and regional farmers markets associations around the country, we were ultimately unsuccessful in our application. The FACFM board has opted instead to apply for 501(c)(6) status and is currently pursuing that resolution.

- **Improved communications, outreach and networking:** Through the FMPP project, FACFM was able to implement a number of strategies that improved communications and effectiveness for board members, including establishment of a monthly schedule of conference call board meetings; establishment of a GoogleDocs site that allowed the board to quickly share and collaborate on documents. Our website was upgraded to include FACFM email addresses for all board members.

In addition to board communications, the FMPP project allowed us to improve our communications and outreach to FACFM members, including market managers, farmers and technical assistance providers. FACFM participated as a partner in the 2009 and 2010 University of Florida/IFAS Small Farms Conference, held each summer in Central Florida. Our booth at the conference allowed us to introduce FACFM to stakeholders from around the state, and we were able to provide scholarships to assist FACFM members with conference registration costs.



Also at the 2010 Small Farms Conference, FACFM partnered with the Florida League of Women Voters to hold a public forum for all candidates for the office of Florida Commissioner of Agriculture in advance of the November 2010 election. This event gave farmers, market managers and consumers an opportunity to hear each candidate's positions, ask questions, and let the candidates know what issues

were important to them. The forum demonstrated to the candidates the important work being done in Florida by farmers markets, and improved FACFM's profile as the organization that brings together farmers market stakeholders and supporters.

- **Implemented management and fiscal systems:** FACFM worked with NPMC to develop and implement sound nonprofit management and fiscal administration systems, including implementation of the Quickbooks accounting system and the hiring of a contracted executive director responsible for board support, meeting facilitation, and project management. Although FACFM was very pleased with the performance of our executive director, Haydee Santana, we were unable to retain her services due to the part-time nature of the work. Although she was recruited away from us after eleven months, Haydee was able to put into place several systems, such as our conference call meeting protocol, that have helped the FACFM board improve their effectiveness and productivity. Due to the limited time period that grant funds would be available to support this position, FACFM opted not to engage another contractor for this position after Haydee's departure, and board members took responsibility for tasks and strategies that had previously been implemented by the executive director.



To address our Buy Local Florida marketing objectives, we implemented the following strategies:

- **Established new target regions:** As a follow-up to the project regions targeted in the Buy Local Florida – Phase 1 project, the FACFM board selected target regions for the Phase 2 project that allowed each board member to have a presence the regions and focus their efforts on outreach, membership recruitment and advocacy. The regions for Phase 2 were: North, encompassing the area north of Gainesville and the Panhandle; Southwest, including the area from Tampa south along the west coast; Southeast, including the area from Miami north to Daytona Beach along the east coast; and Central, including Orlando, Ocala, Gainesville and the surrounding area.
- **Developed Buy Local Florida website:** Our contracted executive director, Haydee Santana, also served as our web contractor, upgrading our existing website, improving accessibility and timeliness, and adding resources for growers, market managers and consumers.
- **Increased and expanded availability of Buy Local Florida support materials:** After conducting a needs assessment and surveys of farmers market managers to determine the most desired marketing support, FACFM produced and distributed point of purchase materials that emphasized the Buy Local Florida message while supporting sales at markets in each region. In addition to market flags, banners and fabric shopping bags, market managers told us that the most valued support during the Phase 1 project had been the reusable laminated price cards with the Buy Local message. We ensured that markets had generous supplies of these price cards as a Phase 2 strategy.
- **Implemented a press campaign:** Journalist Janan Talafer created a series of feature articles highlighting Florida farmers and farmers markets that were submitted for publication to newspapers, magazines and online publishers throughout the state.
- **Conducted targeted media buys:** Building on the successful partnership with public radio established during the Phase 1 project, FACFM expanded our outreach to motivated consumers through advertising, sponsorship and leveraged editorial coverage at five public radio stations throughout the project regions. We supplemented these media buys with print advertising in *Edible Sarasota* magazine and a banner ad on the WMNF website.

C. Specific contributions of project partners

- **University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences UF/IFAS** served as our primary partner for the outreach and marketing portion of the project, helping to link us with small growers statewide, presenting marketing information at our quarterly regional meetings, and providing a venue for FACFM to connect with farmers, market managers and consumers at the annual Small Farms Conference.

- **Florida League of Women Voters** partnered with FACFM to facilitate a nonpartisan forum for all candidates for the office of Florida Agriculture Commissioner. The League provided their experience and expertise in forum planning and provided a professional moderator for the event.



- **Florida Farm Bureau** provided free, centrally-located meeting and training space for regional and statewide membership meetings and training, as well as for FACFM Board of Directors meetings, trainings and retreats.
- **Nonprofit Management Consulting, LLC** served as the contracted provider of organizational development services, training and consulting to support FACFM's capacity-building strategies.
- **Haydee Santana** served as the contracted website designer and served six months as the contracted Executive Director for FACFM.

D. Results, conclusions and lessons learned

Output measures for the Buy Local-Phase 2 project include:

- Number of participants in trainings, workshops and forums: 562
- Trainings and workshops presented for farmers and market managers: 6
- Trainings and workshops presented for FACFM board members: 4
- Scholarships presented to farmers and market managers to attend the UF/IFAS Small Farms Conference: 8

Outcome measures for the Buy Local-Phase 2 project include:

- Number of new farmers markets opened in Florida during the project period: 28
- Number of markets reporting participation by new farmers: 21 markets reporting 22 new farmers participating as vendors
- General increase in business reported by market managers at all markets during the project period (reported anecdotally)
- General increase in knowledge by workshop participants

Conclusions:

- In order to maximize effectiveness of a statewide organization such as FACFM, **an executive director should be employed (not contracted) at least half time.** Our inability to retain our executive director through the entire project period was directly related to the small number of available paid hours and the temporary, contracted nature of the position. With volunteer board members scattered across the very wide geographic area of Florida, an effective and organized executive director is crucial to ensure coordination and follow-through on decisions and activities.



- **A statewide farmers market association is an effective mechanism** to bring together farmers, market managers and consumers to support farmers market expansion, profitability and advocacy. The University of Florida's excellent Cooperative Extension Service focuses mainly on large-scale agriculture, and has only recently begun to provide needed services for small growers and family farmers. Market managers and consumers are often left out of the picture. During the course of the project, we often heard from stakeholders excited to have an umbrella organization under which they could unite to support and improve Florida's farmers markets.



- Volunteer **board members require specific and ongoing training** in support of their roles as policymakers and managers for a nonprofit organization. While most board members came to FACFM with extraordinary expertise in the areas of agriculture and farmers market production, many did not have a governance background and needed support to become effective decision-makers and to provide appropriate oversight for a nonprofit corporation. All

participating board members reported increased understanding of their roles over the course of the project, but also stressed a continuing need for training and technical assistance as the organization grows.

E. Current or future benefits to be derived from the project

Current benefits of the project include:

- Enhanced grower-market-consumer network
- A stronger statewide association to provide visibility and advocacy for the farmers market movement
- Increased public awareness of the important role that local growers play in community nutrition and economy
- Increased consumer traffic at local farmers' markets
- Increased consumer interest in locally grown food
- Increased marketing opportunities and skills among growers
- Increased access to fresh, affordable, locally-grown produce and farm products
- Increased interest and economic revitalization of neighborhoods in which farmers' markets are located
- Increased awareness of the environmental and economic benefits of buying locally grown food



Future benefits of the project include:

- Continuing advocacy and awareness activities on the part of FACFM
- Increased awareness of the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture of the importance of Florida's farmers markets and understanding of the needs of growers, market managers and consumers. We hope this will translate into stronger advocacy and support for farmers markets at the state government level.
- A stronger voice for farmers markets among networked stakeholders

F. Additional information available

Information and resources developed through this project are available at the FACFM website: www.facfm.org.

G. Recommendations for future research needed

The most frustrating and disappointing aspect of this project for the FACFM Board of Directors was the inability to attain 501(c)(3) status for the organization. We understand from talking with representatives of other state farmers market organizations that this barrier has been insurmountable for all but one or two associations with the resources available to mount an extended legal appeal against a negative decision.

We hope that in the future USDA will be able to work with the Internal Revenue Service as an advocate on behalf of state and local farmers market associations to demonstrate that these organizations fulfill the IRS's definition of a public charity under Section 501(c)(3) and should therefore be appropriately categorized as tax-exempt organizations.

H. Contact person for the project

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I. Description of project beneficiaries

Project beneficiaries for the Buy Local – Phase 2 project include the FACFM Board of Directors; both member and non-member markets; farmers, specialty growers and other market vendors; market managers; consumers; and local municipalities that utilize farmers markets as part of their downtown redevelopment strategy.