

## **Educational and Marketing Strategies for a Growing Northeast Arkansas Farmers' Market**

The goals of the project are to ensure the sustainable future of the ASU Regional Farmers' Market (ARFM) by increasing and diversifying the participation of vendors and consumers. The objectives are to survey and address consumer needs, increase direct marketing of the farmers market to an expanded consumer base, increase the participation and knowledge base of the farmers/vendors at the ARFM by providing education in business practices and crop planning, and evaluate needs, program successes, or areas for change.

[Final Report](#)

## **2007 FARMERS' MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM**

### **FINAL REPORT**

#### **FOR**

### **EDUCATIONAL AND MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR A GROWING NORTHEAST ARKANSAS FARMERS' MARKET**

The ASU Regional Farmers' Market began in June 2006. Although an excellent location was established and donations from banks, insurance companies and others helped establish the market we were having a hard time attracting growers to be vendors at the market. We had some free advertising when radio stations did interviews with us and articles were written in the newspaper and other publications about the newly established market. Customers were coming out but our vendor base was limited in number. Also most of the vendors that we did have were limited in what they were growing and had a relatively short season. We needed to expand our growing season so that the market would stay active from early spring through late fall.

The grant from USDA/AMS has helped us with getting the market really established and the vendor base has grown from about 20 to over 60. We were averaging about 8 vendors each week in 2006 but in 2009 that has increased to an average of 14 vendors. We had a record high of 25 vendors this year on a Saturday in July. Several other Saturdays we had over 20 during the peak of the season. We started a Tuesday market day and this has continued to grow as well through the work that we have been able to do through the grant award.

The ASU Regional Farmers' Market advisory board held a statewide conference in Jonesboro on February 29, 2008. The conference was organized around the theme Come Grow With Us. This conference was a huge success with over 150 in attendance. We decided to invite the Arkansas Farmers' Market Association to hold their annual meeting in conjunction with our conference. This partnership proved to be very rewarding. The conference emphasized growing techniques to extend the growing season for growers and the potential for increased income from growing a greater variety of agriculture products. The conference also introduced participants to marketing ideas for promoting their produce and making booth areas more attractive and visible.

One of the big highlights of the conference was the use of the hand held transmitters that involved audience participation. We asked a series of questions after several of the power point presentations in which the audience could respond to at their seats by clicking on the response pad. The answers were then on the screen immediately and everyone could see how many answers were in each category and what percentages were in the response. This was very interesting and the participants of the conference enjoyed the interaction. We only had 50 keypads so we only got a sampling of about one third of the participants. However, those responding were all growers.

After the conference was held we began to see a lot of interest from small growers that wanted to give us a try. As part of our plan we knew that our advertising was a very important key to getting more people out to support the larger group of vendors. The emphasis in the 2008 season was on advertising and promotion. We saw 16,287 adults come through the market during the season. This was a considerable increase over the previous year. Advertising does make a difference and the new signage has drawn attention to the market. Comments through the community about the signage and the quality of vendors we are bringing in have been very rewarding to the advisory board. Our market has truly become a community event each week.

We were able to have a corn maze and special pumpkin patch project during 2008. Children came out to play, get pictures taken and it created an atmosphere of a fall festival. Our advertising dollars helped with promoting these events as well as the market during the whole season.

We complete 410 customer surveys and the coupon incentives that we did were a big hit. We were able to give each person that completed a survey \$3.00 worth of farmers market bucks to spend at the vendor of their choice. This was an incentive to do the survey and also helped our vendors get some business and maybe some new customers that could try produce from various vendors. We did 310 surveys on a Saturday and 100 on a Tuesday. The survey report was completed by the Arkansas State University Center for Social Research. The results of the survey helped us to target our advertising, promotion and special events to targeted groups. The radio station that we contracted to do radio spots came out during a Saturday during July of 2008 and did a live remote. They cooked breakfast for everyone and gave us a lot of publicity.

We also advertised through newsprint and developed a new eye catching logo during 2008.

During the 2009 season we continued to target audiences through three radio station in Jonesboro. This year we entered into an agreement with KASU the voice of the ASU campus life to do advertising throughout the whole season. Also we have two other radio stations doing spots reaching two different audiences each week through most of the season.

We purchased promotional items to help advertise the ASU Regional Farmers' Market. We purchased wildflower packets that had our name, logo and website address on them to hand out at the Chamber of Commerce Business Expo and also at the farmers' market. We also purchased shirts with our logo for the market manager, board members and volunteers to help identify them with the market and to advertise. We purchased caps and bring it back bags to give out for various special events. These items had name and logo, with Go Green and Reduce Our Carbon Footprint slogans on them. Each vendor received a cap to help advertise.

The grant award has helped our market grow by leaps and bounds. The advertising dollars and signage along with the statewide conference that we held has really increased

our presence as a market and without the grant we would have been struggling along. We have also have been able to increase our vendor participation and the future looks bright for the ASU Regional Farmers' Market.

The Arkansas Agriculture Department recognized our success and awarded a grant to us in the amount of \$75,000 that has been designated as seed money for a market building to help us alleviate the problem on rainy days at the market. A structure will also help us to handle the need for electricity, restrooms and other needs that a growing market has.

A new website is available for the ASU Regional Farmers' Market and gives details of those involved on the advisory board and appropriate contact information. The website address is: [www.asuregionalfarmersmarket.org](http://www.asuregionalfarmersmarket.org)

We would like to extend our gratitude to those involved from the USDA Agricultural Market Service for helping our market along with hundreds of others in the United States. This is a very worthwhile program that helps our local family farms and local economies.

For additional information please contact Robert B. Young at [robert.young@ar.usda.gov](mailto:robert.young@ar.usda.gov) or at 870-972-4671 ext. 7.