

Mendocino County Farmers' Market Association Community Supported Agriculture and Promotional Program

The goals of MCFMA's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and promotional program are to increase accessibility of local fresh fruits and vegetables to a diverse population, including low-income individuals and families, seniors and ethnic minorities; and to strengthen the health of communities by providing nutritional fresh local produce grown by local farmers, which will in turn support farming families and the local economy with the establishment of CSAs at five farmers markets, expansion of two existing CSAs, and implementation of an outreach and educational campaign to broaden the customer base at the Association's eight farmers markets.

[Final Report](#)

Mendocino County Farmers' Market Association
P.O. 2167
Fort Bragg, CA 95437

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TO: Carmen Humphrey
Supervisory Agricultural Marketing Specialist
Marketing Services Branch
Transportation and Marketing, AMS, USDA
1400 Independence Ave, SW Room 2646-S, Stop 0269
Washington, D.C. 20250-0269

FROM: Marbry Sipila, Project Manager
MCFMA

SUBJECT: Final Report

Through the Farmers' Market Promotion Program the Mendocino County Farmers' Market Association initiated a comprehensive promotional program to increase accessibility of local fresh fruits and vegetables to a diverse population in our farmer's market communities, including low-income individuals and families, seniors and ethnic groups through expanding upon an existing CSA pilot program initiated in Boonville in 2005 and Laytonville in 2006, to include all seven market locations within the county. Secondary, but equally important goals were to increase sales, improve our eight Farmers' Markets and to support our local vendors through consumer education and community outreach, data gathering, marketing and vendor education. Our promotional program included the following four components:

1. Community Supported Agriculture Program at five of our farmers markets, while supporting our already existing two Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) market programs. The CSA allowed the public to buy memberships in advance for the market season.
2. Consumer Education and Community Outreach was accomplished through:
 - A. "Friends of the Market" table at each market to manage the CSA, distribute information and interface with the public
 - B. Articles in local newspapers
 - C. Chef Demonstrations – two per market
 - D. Recycling and Waste Management – Signs throughout all markets and providing reusable tote bags at cost
 - E. Spanish Speaker at four of the markets for two hours

3. Marketing – New signs and banners at all markets
4. Surveys conducted at all markets on both consumer and vendor opinions

CSA

The CSA programs, which we decided to call Friends of MCFARM (standing for Mendocino Co. Farmers' Market Association), were created at each of our markets. Tables were set up at each market and were staffed by an individual who interfaced with the community, distributed brochures on the program, sold memberships and accepted donations for subsidized memberships for low income people. Members of Friends of MCFARM came and picked up their "Green Bucks" each week to spend at the vendors of their choice. At the end of each market the vendors were reimbursed for "Green Bucks" received.

Grant funded tote bags were also sold at the Friends table and nutritional information and recipes were distributed. At three of the markets, once a month, a Master Gardener from a U.C. Davis program was available to answer local gardening questions.

The structure of the Friends of MCFARM allowed some very positive programs to occur at the Ukiah and Willits markets. Both of these markets did incredible outreach and were in collaboration with service organizations that helped fund subsidized memberships to Friends of MCFARM. North Coast Opportunities funded \$1000 in both communities for work exchange in various community gardens for MCFARM memberships. The Community Foundation awarded \$4,400 for eleven families to receive work exchange memberships for \$400 (\$20 for 20 weeks). Some of the gardens where work exchange occurred included the Ford St. Garden, a substance abuse recovery house, Head Start, which serves a Hispanic community, and Pinolville Pomo Nation Garden Project. These memberships allowed low-income folks to come to the market and purchase wonderful produce, who would not otherwise attend the Farmers Market. They also learned how to garden and help create food for themselves and others.

At the Fort Bragg market, proceeds from coffee sales went to give senior citizens Green Bucks to spend at their market.

The Ukiah Market piloted a Food Stamp benefit program at the Friends of MCFARM Table with participants using their electronic benefit transfer (EBT) to exchange stamps for "Green Bucks".

At the Willits Market, First 5 had a table alongside the Friends of MCFARM Table where they were reaching out to families with children from ages 0-5. They conducted surveys and handed out "Green Bucks" to those that completed the questionnaires to spend at the market. They helped fund four subsidized families to the Friends of MCFARM program.

The biggest challenge in the implementation of our CSA program was that not all market managers were enthused about it. This grant was written and created by one person, thinking that everyone in the organization was onboard with the vision. When it came time for implementation a few market managers were very resistant. The biggest lesson learned was that when taking on a project of this scope, be sure to have a supportive team working with you to make the job a pleasure and a success. In the markets where the managers were supportive, the CSA program was a huge success. They did the needed outreach within the community and received support from local community service organizations that gave them financial assistance to give low income people subsidized memberships to the Friends of MCFARM program. One year after receiving the grant, the CSA programs are still in place and receiving support from within their communities. The Friends of MCFARM tables are a part of the markets and continue to be a center for community outreach and are where promotional items are sold.

Consumer Education and Community Outreach Newspaper Articles

Originally in the grant we were going to create a newsletter and distribute it within the market communities. We changed this to submitting Farmers Market related articles in the local papers within the county. This allowed us a much broader readership without the printing costs. We have established a site on www.cloudforest.org/MCFARM-Articles where authors could submit articles to be printed. This was very helpful for the newspaper contact person as they could pull articles from here, edit them if desired and then submit them to their local paper. One article had the possibility of being printed in various papers. These articles were a great way to reach a large audience with very little cost. They informed readers of what produce was in season, events happening at the markets and were in general a great outreach to folks. There were two papers in the county that did not want to print our articles so those communities were not able to benefit from this part of the promotional project.

Nutritional Information

Easy to read fun filled facts about many foods available at the Farmers' Market were handed out at the Friends of MCFARM table at each of the markets. These also included recipes for some of the foods available at the markets.

Master Gardeners

Once a month at three of our markets a Master Gardener from the University of California Davis program would be at the Friends of MCFARM Table to give advice and answer questions on local gardening.

Chef Demonstrations

The grant allowed us to purchase equipment for our markets to share for chef demonstrations. During the season each market was able to host two chef demonstrations, where a local chef would prepare seasonal produce, hand out samples and recipes. This was very popular with the consumers and the vendors alike, as it helped educate and inspire the public on different ways to prepare fresh local produce. Because we now have the equipment and the knowledge that chef demonstrations are popular, promote market products and educational, markets will host chef demos in the future.

Recycling

Signs were created for each market to encourage shoppers to bring their own bags and to recycle bags. We were able to purchase market tote bags and cloth produce bags and offered them to market customers at wholesale prices to help reduce the use of plastic bags at our Farmers' Markets. These reusable bags were sold at the Friends of MCFARM tables. Money from the sales of these bags is reinvested in more bags, so we will be able to continue to offer them in the years to come. In our survey of market vendors, their response was that customers are using less plastic bags.

Spanish Speaking Liaison

Four of our markets were funded to have a Spanish Speaking Liaison at their market for two hours each market. This was to help increase the numbers of Hispanic shoppers at our markets and to help them feel welcome and comfortable at our markets. Two of the markets had a difficult time keeping this position filled, so instead they hired Mexican musicians to play at their markets to draw in the Latino population. This proved to be a better idea than the Spanish Speaking Liaison; however, there was not a noticeable increase in Hispanic customers at any of our markets. This part of our promotional program was not a success.

Marketing Signs and Banners

All eight markets were able to purchase new signs or banners to help advertise and promote their markets. This proved to be very beneficial as we discovered in our customer surveys that signage is one of the top ways in which the public is reminded about the Farmers' Market. These signs will be used for years and were a worthwhile investment.

Surveys

We created questionnaires for surveying the customers at each of the markets, a vendor survey, and a membership survey. This piece of the grant proved to be the most enlightening. The customer survey was conducted by a contracted individual that had no previous connection with the Farmers' Market so she was neutral and none biased. Each market was surveyed individually. Four large easels were used with the questions written on them with multiple choice answers. The customer was given sticky dots to put under the answers of their choice and they could write in an answer if they chose. This made the survey fun and folks willingly participated, unlike being approached with a clipboard and verbally being asked questions, which can be intimidating for many people. This also allowed for more people to participate.

The results of the customer survey were surprising and informative. The following are some of the most important questions with the results:

Where do you hear or are reminded about the Farmers Market?

1. Word of mouth
2. Signs and posters
3. Newspaper

How often do you come to the Farmers Market?

1. Most weeks
2. Visiting from out of town

What would entice you to shop more at this Farmers Market?

1. More variety of produce and products
2. Lower prices

What are the main reasons you come to the market?

1. Support for producers of local foods/Personal connections with Farmers
2. Freshness/Unique varieties/Confidence in the products
3. Social/Entertainment/Community Connections

From the results of the survey we are able to make informed decisions on individual markets and the association as a whole, especially where to spend advertising dollars most effectively. Market Managers were surprised that the overwhelming majority of people are reminded about the market by word of mouth. This has concentrated energy and money on making our markets better and a fun place to be, as customers talking to others about the markets is our most effective form of advertisement. Communities with regular newspaper articles proved to be a very beneficial form of advertising also. Markets in towns where the local newspaper did not carry a regular column on the Farmers Market are spending less money on newspaper ads as they are not as effective as

good signs. We realized that posters and signs are a very important form of advertising. Managers were also able to see that a good percentage of customers in towns with tourists coming through have a high percentage of out of town customers, which also supports the importance of posters and signs for advertising.

Our individual market surveys conducted of the vendors gave us feedback on each market. The general MCFARM membership surveys let us know the members opinions on stall space, market fees, general meetings and how are organization benefits the vendors. All of the results have been saved and can be reviewed when making decisions. Before the surveys were conducted we were only assuming what the customers' and the vendors' opinions were.

The Mendocino County Farmers' Market Association is very thankful to have received many benefits from the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program and we will continue to benefit in the future as we now have in place the Friends of MCFARM program, chef demonstrations, reusable shopping bags and signs to encourage recycling, regular newspaper articles in market communities, new market signs and banners and important information from our surveys. For those interested in receiving more information about the Mendocino County Farmers' Market Association's promotional program and any grant related activities please feel free to contact us through marbrysip@gmail.com or phone 707 272-1907.

Thank you,

Marbry Sipila
Project Manager