

Riverside Farmers Market

The project's primary goal is to provide fresh, attractively displayed, competitively priced products from local vendors in a market setting of bi-weekly themes that encourage community social interaction. The project's secondary goal is the promotion of community health and wellness, through vendor and consumer education, emphasizing the community supported agriculture benefits, and their impact upon food security. The project will promote the new Riverside Farmers Market through advertising to consumers, farmer recruitment and training, and educational events linking fresh food with community health and wellness.

Final Report

AMS-Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)

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Submitted by

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Background

The initial year for the Riverside Farmers Market was 2007. There were no other farmers markets in the immediate area and a definite interest was expressed in the communities of Oakland, Carson, and Macedonia. A group of interested community members met and a Riverside Farmers Market committee was formed. The committee organized the market and 2 volunteers were chosen as the market managers. The guidelines and applications were established by gleaning information from other markets. Locally grown produce and locally handcrafted items were the parameters of the Riverside Farmers Market. Approximately 100 contacts were made for possible vendors. The 2007 market season had 3-5 vendors. Three vendors were there for the entire season—2 vegetable producers and a baked goods vendor. The first season averaged 30 to 50 shoppers per week.

Issues:

- Riverside Farmers Market held 4 planning meetings during the 2007-08 winter. Planning meetings were held to create and revise the market guidelines and vendor application which were distributed to our potential vendors with a letter of invitation. This was done for both the 2008 and 2009 seasons.
- The 2008 market was held June 11 – October 8, from 3:30 – 6:00pm with bi-weekly events.
- In 2009, the Riverside Farmers Market will be held June 3 – October 7, from 3:30-6:00pm with bi-weekly events planned. The shopper numbers increased to more than 50 per week with some weeks exceeding 75 shoppers.
- The guidelines and application were shared with other area communities interested in starting a farmers market. The community of Marne, Iowa has started a Friday night Farmers Market in 2008 and the community of Griswold is planning a Farmers Market for the 2009 season.
- Market managers and vendors received training in Des Moines from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Feb. 11, 2008 and January 31, 2009.
- Training - Vendor training was held on April 16, 2008, with a speaker about Community Supported Agriculture. On January 15, 2009, training was conducted with a guest speaker providing information on food safety and a demonstration on presentation/display of market items. Also on January 15, 2009 a guest spoke on the Southwest Iowa Food and Farm Initiative and Buy Fresh Buy Local program.
- Advertising posters and news releases created for 2008 and 2009 markets.
- A unique Riverside Farmers Market logo was created by a local artist and adopted by the market committee. A permanent sign and sturdy portable signs have been purchased. The permanent sign has been placed at the market site.

Project Problems and Solutions:

- Goal: Outreach to the community by the use of portable English and Spanish signs, unfortunately the Spanish signs were stolen. Purchased new, sturdy, portable multi-language signs to be used in 2009. Volunteers and community businesses will store the portable signs and will put them in place on Wednesdays, the market day.
- Purchased tables and chairs to use for our bi-weekly events. Also will use these as a hospitality area for our customers. Location of the market is on asphalt adjacent to downtown and the location is often very hot during the summer. With other funds we plan to purchase canopies for shade for the events and for the hospitality area for the 2009 market.
- Certified Market: For the first time in 2009, there will be 4 vendors who will be WIC/Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program certified. This will enable the Riverside Farmers Market to be a certified market and thus able to accept the WIC/SFMNP checks.

Project Interest:

- Create interest in Riverside Farmers Market through the bi-weekly events. Have community involvement in the events through their participation in the event.

2007 Events

Music
Wool Spinning
Pet Parade
Seed Spitting Contest
Tomato Tasting
Wine Tasting
Chef Demo
Pumpkin Painting

2008 Events

Cooking Demo
Flower Arranging
Pie Baking Contest
Christmas in July
Wine Tasting
Water Rescue Team
Seed Spitting
Holiday Boutique
Veggie Races
Pumpkin Painting

2009 Events

Music/Cooking Demo
Local Food Cooking Demo
Pie Baking Contest
Patriotic Costume Contest
Christmas in July
Japanese Flower Arranging
Local Wines Tasting
Salsa Music/Salsa Tasting
Taste of Iowa Contest
Pumpkin Painting

- Keeping the community informed through advertising, posters, flyers, and portable signs.
- Planned contests and weekly drawings to spark community involvement. The events are viewed as family fun. The seed spitting and veggie races were the most well received by young and old alike.
- The Riverside Farmers Market is a member of the Buy Fresh Buy Local marketing campaign. Other funding was used for listing in the Buy Fresh Buy Local directory.
- The Iowa Farm Bureau donated plastic shopping bags for use by the Market vendors which created some continuity for the Market and pleased the vendors.
- Advertising was purchased through the news media, radio and the local flyers and posters, as well as permanent and portable signage. This has been effective to train shoppers where and when the Riverside Farmers Market will be in operation. This is the main reason the vendors and shoppers have increased each year of the Market.

Project Needs:

The rural area of Pottawattamie County in western Iowa did not have a farmers market and the farmers market in the city of Council Bluffs (pop. 58,000) was having leadership issues and lacked a positive location (they conduct their market in a parking garage). The communities of Oakland, Carson and Macedonia combine to form the Riverside School district, so it seemed natural to form the farmers market through those communities as well. The creation of the Riverside Farmers Market was led by a committee of concerned and civic minded citizens. Dates and hours were established with guidelines and applications gleaned from other markets in Iowa. The Riverside Farmers Market committee is a volunteer group, with two community activists working as the co-market managers.

Future Needs

- Update current vendor list and increase outreach to potential vendors.
- Always looking for new vendors and expanding capacity of current vendors.
- Increase coordination/cooperation between the Riverside Farmers Market and other farmers markets in the area concerning vendor training and varying the market days to avoid undue competition. A regional Market Managers Conference might be helpful.
- Advertising for the promotion of the Riverside Farmers Market and for adding new vendors to the market.
- Provide training for market managers and vendors. Also need to coordinate/collaborate the training with other area markets.

Conclusions:

The Riverside Farmers Market has been an enjoyable and successful event for the communities of Oakland, Carson, and Macedonia. The goal of providing locally grown produce and locally hand-crafted items has been met for now, but increasing the vendor numbers will provide a more varied and stable choice of produce and products. The Riverside Farmers Market would be able to share their vendor list with other markets to increase the sales of all markets in southwest Iowa. Currently there seems to be competition for vendors and a lack of new growers in southwest Iowa.

During the 2008 season, the Riverside Farmers Market had 6 seasonal vendors who were there each week and 15 non-seasonal vendors. By having the “Christmas in July” and “Holiday Boutique” weeks the market was able to increase the number of vendors---thus on two specific dates the market included non-locally grown items. The vendors and Market Managers saw a definite increase in shoppers in 2008.

For the first time the Riverside Farmers Market plans to be a WIC/Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program certified market in 2009 and is a Buy Fresh Buy Local member. The market is also working to partner with the Iowa Farm to School Program to provide fresh vegetables from its vendors to 3rd-5th grade students this fall.

The communities and producers are already looking forward to the 2009 season. Through community support, the 2009 market will be able to offer more cooking demonstrations utilizing local foods and thus increasing the number of events. The feed back received concerning the market was always positive and thanks mainly to the two community volunteers who lead the market and the AMS funding the Riverside Farmers Market is running smoothly and improving each year.