

Development and Implementation of Sparta/Hancock Community Market

Sparta/Hancock Produce Growers Cooperative, Inc. of Sparta, GA received \$45,909 to establish a new farmers market in the Sparta community. Funds were used to purchase advertising, equipment, and other supplies for the new market; develop educational and networking programs for farmers, and finance promotional events and advertising campaigns.

Final Report

FINAL REPORT

GA-037-2008-G-0700 –DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SPARTA/HANCOCK COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKET

FINAL REPORT/MARCH 2010

ISSUES BEING EXAMINED

- PROJECT GOALS: TO ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKET VIA PARTICIPATION AMONG DIVERSE GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND RESOURCES IN RURAL MIDDLE GEORGIA
- AND TO PROVIDE AN OUTLET FOR FRESH, LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCE FOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AND
- TO SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS.

Implementation of the market began on December 15, 2008 with a meeting of the steering committee and interested farmers and community members. **Agenda – attachment #1.**

There were 13 people in attendance. Email addresses were obtained to foster improved communication among the group.

The steering committee (Sherry Henry, Project Manager; Sid Cox, Market Manager; and Pat Henry Co-op Treasurer) began meeting weekly in January 2009 to plan for the May opening of the Market. Market Mission Statement, Vendor Applications, and Proposed Rules for the Market were established. **Attachment #2.**

Web pages were produced for our web site www.spartahancockgrowers.com for our educational programs and Small Farm Field Day.

May 9, 2009 saw the first Small Farm Field Day in Hancock County. It was attended by 15 people, a diverse group of farmers/growers, gardeners, and citizens with an interest in locally grown food. The day began with a presentation of Market Opportunities, followed by a presentation on preventing wildlife damage in the garden. This particular presentation was very interesting to observe, as the gardeners tend to spray repellent for deer and the farmers/gardeners tend to shoot them. Each group learned from the other. I like to think that some viewpoints were broadened. We completed one farm tour in the morning, and three in the afternoon. Each agricultural setting was different and featured different horticultural techniques. We enjoyed a catered lunch at Currey Organics (formerly Fat Back Farm), which is a beautiful restored antebellum home in the Sparta Historic District. The UGA extension office was able to provide us with a bus to facilitate transportation to the different venues. **Attachment #3 – Field Day Program/web page and pictures/ and newspaper article.**

Workshops were presented on May 12th, May 14th and May 21, 2010. Each workshop was well attended (average attendance 15 people). The first workshop presented an opportunity to work with the Teens A Million Organization and the Community Advocates to Prevent Childhood Obesity, both local organizations with a mission to provide local produce and foster an interest in growing vegetables. Teens A Million wanted to start a community garden, and other

attendees were interested in the basics of vegetable gardening for the home- the attendance at this program was especially diverse. The second workshop focused on composting. The third workshop was oriented more toward business with a focus on marketing and advertising in the Agribusiness setting. Speakers were experts in their fields and were knowledgeable and entertaining. **Attachment #4 – flyers for each program.**

The Sparta/Hancock Community Farmers Market opened on May 30th, 2009. The opening day event was well received and featured a live band, market t-shirts with purchase, and a raffle for \$50 in produce. There were over 100 people in attendance throughout the morning.

Attachment #5 – Market webpage and pictures.

Advertising for the market was accomplished through print ads, newspaper articles, ad in the Ga. Farmer/Market Bulletin, and t-shirts featuring the market logo. **Attachment #6 – copies of published news articles.**

SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF PROJECT PARTNERS

The Bank of Hancock provided an excellent, centralized location for the market.

The County Cooperative Extension Agent, Greg Glover, provided expertise and speakers for our educational offerings.

The University of Georgia, College of Agriculture, Dr. Kent Wolfe, provided his expertise on Marketing for Agribusiness as well as encouragement in the establishment of the Market.

Dr. Jim Spotts presented the Composting Workshop.

Teens A Million and Community Advocates to Prevent Childhood Obesity assisted with the Gardening Workshop. Bobby Wilson, County Extension Agent from Fulton County, presented the workshop.

Oconee River RC&D and NRCS assisted with Small Farm Field Day.

The Sparta Hancock Growers Cooperative members worked at the market, wrote articles for the local newspaper, and assisted with the educational programs.

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The market was established on a seasonal basis and was a success. See survey, **attachment 7.**

Lessons learned: Most of the lessons learned had to do with this being our first grant experience. No one in the cooperative had any experience working with grants or the USDA. I overestimated our ability to spend in some situations, leaving a large balance in the account at the end of the funding period.

Overall, we lacked a basic understanding of the process. Requiring grant recipients to be present for an educational program, as I understand it is this year, would have been helpful.

CURRENT AND FUTURE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE PROJECT

The Sparta Hancock Community Farmers Market is scheduled to reopen in May 2010. We have been contacted by the local newspaper that will do an article on the opening. We have seen an increased interest in the market as well as a CSA program in the community. The cooperative will sponsor ongoing programs relating to the benefits of fresh, local produce and food preparation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE

www.spartahancockgrowers.com

Please refer to the attached documentation

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Those who have benefited from the projects accomplishments:

The local community has benefitted by having fresh, locally grown produce available, both organic and produced using traditional methods. Additionally, the market became a gathering place on Saturdays mornings during the summer and supported sales of 3-5 vendors. Local farmers benefitted by having an outlet available for their produce. There were also food and plant vendors at times during the season.