

2012

\$89,875 to Clarkston Community Center, Clarkston, GA, to provide marketing and information exchange opportunities and increased market capacity for refugee farmers by creating a food hub, implementing promotional and advertising campaigns, purchasing cold storage equipment, and expanding the Clarkston Farmers Market from monthly to weekly operation.

Final Report

Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report
For the Period of October 1, 2011 – September 30, 2015

Date: 12/18/2015
Recipient Name: Clarkston Community Center
Project Title: FMPP
Grant Number: 12-25-G-1553
Project Location: Clarkston, GA
Amount Awarded: \$89,875.00
Contact: McKenzie Wren, Executive Director, director@clarkstoncommunitycenter.org; 404-508-1050

Goals and Objectives:

Clarkston Farmer's Market Access Project is part of the Clarkston Food Security Initiative. The goal of the initiative is to reduce food insecurity among low-income, primarily refugee, residents of Clarkston, Georgia. The FMPP grant allowed Clarkston Community Center (CCC) to become a "food hub" where culturally appropriate fresh produce was made available from refugee farmers to refugee residents through our farmers market, food co-op and food pantry. CCC served as a learning hub for low-income, disadvantaged, immigrants and women to support refugee agriculture and increase access to markets.

The USDA FMPP grant supported the Clarkston Farmers Market for the 2013 and 2014 seasons. During these two years, CCC pursued the following goals:

1. Move the monthly market to a weekly market.
2. Expand reach of community supported agriculture program
3. Increase knowledge of refugee growers to sustain/expand their agriculture business.

Activities:

1. Clarkston Community Center hosted monthly or weekly farmers markets between April and November. Over the grant period, 10,055 people visited the Clarkston Farmers Market. CCC worked with nearly 40 vendors to provide products at the farmers market. CCC continued to participate in Wholesome Wave and offer SNAP families a \$2 for \$1 value on their EBT cards.
2. CCC coordinated the Clarkston Food Co-op with 12 families (55 individuals) annually by the end of the grant period. Through the resources generated by this grant, CCC was able to increase participation in the food co-op from 6 families to 12 families over the grant period. These families pay a small fee (\$5/month) to become members in the co-op. Members make the decision on what food to purchase. They pick up the food from the Atlanta Food Bank and they participate in the distribution of the food to co-op members.
3. CCC coordinated the Cares4Clarkston food pantry. This pantry is a collaboration with a local church. The church distributes food one Saturday per month and Clarkston Community Center distributes food one additional Saturday per month. CCC changed our implementation of our food pantry distribution day. Prior to 2014, families would simply receive a bag of food. We

chose to implement an empowerment model where each family could “shop” or choose from the available food. Prices for food items were also displayed so each pantry participant could easily determine how much money they would have to have to purchase this food for their family. Understanding food prices and empowering themselves to shop for the food their family wanted and needed is one more step to helping them know when they can move from pantry assistance to become self-sufficient.

Accomplishments:

1. CCC doubled food stamp value for SNAP recipients who purchased goods through our farmers market.
2. CCC held 16 healthy cooking demonstrations per year during the farmers market reaching 1,100 visitors annually.
3. CCC after school students participated in our community garden, planting 10 vegetables in their own plot. They then harvested these vegetables and prepared healthy snacks with them.
4. The CCC Food Co-op worked with 12 families by the end of the grant period, serving a total of 55 individuals per year.
5. The CCC Food Pantry served approximately 45 to 50 families (approximately 200 individuals) with twice per month distributions during the grant period.
6. Families in the food co-op learned basic computer skills in order to select items through an online ordering process for the Atlanta Community Food Bank.

Beneficiaries:

The CCC Food Hub program served in this period 3,942. For entire grant period 10,814

Farmers market – 10,055

Food Co-op – 123

Food Pantry – 540

After School - 96

The recipients or constituents of the food hub program are primarily low-income with approximately half being immigrants or recently arrived refugees. Clarkston, Georgia is a major resettlement location and has residents from more than 57 different countries, including Burma, Bhutan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Most of the African refugees were settled five or more years ago. In recent years, the greatest number of refugees have been from Burma and Bhutan. 75% of Clarkston’s population is either African-American or recently arrived refugee families. Unfortunately, Clarkston is also characterized by high poverty with 25% of all residents below poverty and 56% of foreign-born residents living below the poverty line. 1 in 2 children in Clarkston live in poverty.

Refugees and Food Stamps: The agencies who resettle refugees help each family become qualified for SNAP when they arrive. However, with the overwhelming nature of resettling into a new culture and community where you do not speak the language, understanding SNAP benefits and utilizing them is often very difficult. In most cases, adult refugees must rely on their children to learn English quickly and to help them utilize SNAP benefits. If the children are too young or do not understand, SNAP benefits are never

used. The number of households with members on SNAP has been rising with the poverty rate. However, usage of SNAP benefits, even with doubling through Wholesome Wave, has remained below what might be expected in a community with such high poverty.

Limited English Proficient: Racial diversity in Clarkston is very high with 17% of the population being Caucasian, 60% being African American or African refugee and 28% being Asian or primarily Bhutanese or Burmese refugees. Refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Bhutan, and Burma have made Clarkston their home. Of the total population (7,631), 45% (3,475) are foreign born. Because much of this diversity comes from the resettlement of foreign-born refugees, there is also a very high number of the population who speak limited or no English and whose primary language spoken at home is one other than English. 81% of the foreign-born individuals in Clarkston do not speak English in their home, making the overall percentage of residents who do not speak English at home 33.4%.

Lessons Learned:

Challenges: CCC encountered growing competition from nearby communities who successfully launched their own farmers markets. The growth in popularity of farmers markets was unexpected in 2011 and presented a significant challenge to CCC as the population targeted for our market was low-income and diverse. While other farmers markets were simply offering an alternative food source to grocery store customers, at CCC, we were working with residents who experience generational poverty or recently arrived refugees who are unfamiliar with supermarkets or farmers markets and who have limited English proficiency.

Positive Results: Without question, CCC's farmers market and entire food hub program built relationships between local growers and residents in and around Clarkston. The availability of fresh, local produce at the farmers market, in our food co-op and food pantry increased significantly during the time period of this grant. In addition, our community garden expanded to provide plots to other non-profits serving low-income and refugee residents as well as provided some harvested vegetables to our farmers market, food co-op and food pantry.

Advice: We suggest any organization bringing a farmers market concept to low-income communities focus resources on understanding their customers' needs. Unlike middle-income communities where individuals are accustomed to grocery stores and understand the value-added products they receive through a farmers market, low-income and refugee residents may not fully comprehend the added value of fresh produce or even understand the difference in products available at a traditional grocery store versus a farmers market. Despite our efforts, our farmers market never maximized the use of SNAP doubling for our community. In part, this could be a lack of awareness from refugee residents as to exactly how SNAP works. Many of them rely on their children to help them use their SNAP cards at our market or at a traditional grocery store.