

Recruiting Farmers Market Vendors in the Salmon Valley

The **Salmon Valley Stewardship** of Salmon, Idaho received \$13,800 to help sustain the region's farmers market. Funds were used to recruit and retain Lemhi County Farmers Market vendors, and to develop improved marketing materials that strengthened information sharing between farmers and consumers, and thus increased vendor sales.

[Final Report FY09](#)

Salmon Valley Stewardship

2009 USDA-AMS FMPP Grant

Lemhi County Farmer's Market -Final Report September 2011

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Salmon, Idaho in Lemhi County Idaho

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Project Summary:

Salmon Valley received \$13,860 to hire a part-time market manager whose primary task included recruiting and retaining Lemhi County Farmers Market vendors. A supporting goal was to develop marketing materials that strengthened information sharing between farmers and consumers, enhancing vendor sales and consumer knowledge.

Hiring the volunteer farmers market manager as a part-time employee proved to be incredibly important to the long-term success of the market. The move allowed our organization to facilitate a smooth transition when the founding market manager transferred out-of-state with her family before the season started in 2011.

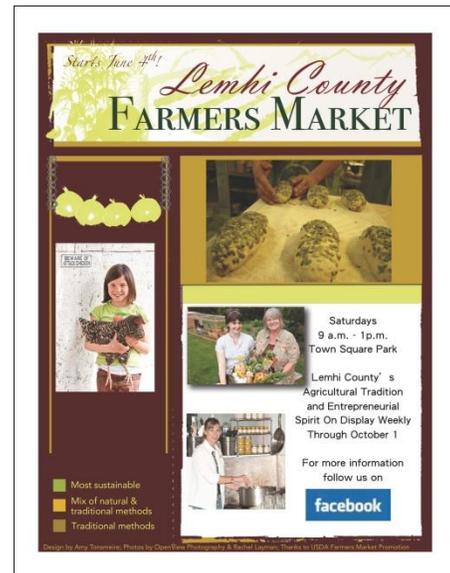
The creation of marketing materials was another lasting investment. The template created in 2010 was used for posters and brochures again in 2011, and was adapted to be the theme for the Lemhi County Farmers Market Facebook page, a blog, and print and online advertisements.

The Farmers Market Promotion Program grant provided the Lemhi County Farmers Market with the opportunity to become established as an institution in our remote Central Idaho community. The presence and ongoing success of the market is seen as the hub for other advances made in our local food movement.



Highlights of the 2010-2011 Lemhi County Farmers Market Made Possible by the FMPP Grant Funds

- Lemhi County Farmers Market manager moved from volunteer status to part-time employee in 2010. When founding market manager and part-time employee moved to Colorado, FMPP funds made it possible to recruit and hire a qualified candidate to manage the market, a feat that most likely would have been impossible without the ability to offer a paid position.
- A commercial photographer and graphic artist were hired that gave our informational products a professional finished look and provided a template that was easy to use the following year.
- Vendor information sheets were printed by request that disclosed the following information: county of origin, pest control method and fertilizer methods employed.
- Funds obtained helped to increase advertising; we have two banners that are now displayed for the summer. Paid advertising was procured in our local newspaper, local online newspaper, and local radio station. Posters were made and displayed in area hotels and in the windows of local businesses.
- The Lemhi County Farmers Market handbooks, posters and flyers were printed.
- A local foods survey was created to gather information on what the local community wanted from a farmers market.
- Travel to the FMPP conference allowed staff to learn firsthand the grant procedures and stipulations and also hear and learn from other grantees about their experiences, problems and solutions.
- SVS's Executive Director provided general staff and program oversight and coordinated the Salmon Local Foods working group, a group of citizens, producers and professionals (including the Lemhi County Farmers Market Manager) to continue to further the promotion of a local food network.



Project Approach

Our project approach was to utilize these funds to bring our market from a volunteer effort to a more organized and financially stable business entity. Establishing the Lemhi County Farmers Market manager as a part-time employee and part of the Salmon Valley Stewardship staff team was critical to achieving this. The adoption of the formerly volunteer Lemhi County Farmers Market gave our organization insight into the need for a more coordinated effort to strengthen our community's local food network. From May to October, the

Lemhi County Farmers Market showcased every Saturday what was right – and wrong – about our capacity as a community to feed ourselves. We used these lessons – the strong demand for locally produced food, the need to extend our growing season, the need to re-build cooking and food preservation skills – as a spring board to develop and support other programs.

The approach of developing marketing materials that specifically addressed questions about where the food was grown and what kind of pesticides if any were used in the production, proved to stimulate discussion from consumers and vendors about basic gardening techniques and the health of our bodies and our land.

The overall approach was to infuse the Lemhi County Farmers Market with capital that would allow for the effort to develop a measure of self-sufficiency. As the Farmers Market Promotion Program aspect of the market comes to close, the continuity and even expansion of the Lemhi County Farmers Market speaks to the success of the approach.

Goals of the Project

Goal 1:

Provide technical assistance to recruit and retain Lemhi County Farmers Market vendors.

We wanted this goal to lead to 4 outcomes: 1) increase vendors, 2) increase quantity of products sold, 3) increase customers, and 4) increase diversity of products sold at the market. We were able to show growth in each area. When we initially started the market, we used University of Idaho information that recommended a small farmers market should have a minimum of 12 weekly vendors and a minimum of 100 weekly visitors. Our full-season vendors grew from 20 in 2009 to 36 in 2011, with 27 vendors being sporadic or one time participants. Seventeen vendors offered produce on a weekly basis and one vendor sold honey. Our average weekly customer count grew to more than 150 by 2011. Quantity of products sold was incredibly hard to determine without requiring post-market reports from vendors weekly. Diversity of products sold was recorded by the market manager and of special importance were the number of craft vendors who began bringing garden produce, fruit or baked goods to the market. Vendors understood that customers were interested in procuring food and not just crafts at the market.

- We hired a skilled market manager to oversee all aspects of market operations, and vendor recruitment and retention, and customer satisfaction.
- Pre-market vendor meetings were held to establish procedures for each market season and gather information from vendors on ways to improve the market.
- Market manager researched permit, insurance, and district health department issues and created a vendor information package for distribution.
- Due to the increasing popularity of the Lemhi County Farmers Market, the market manager proposed and vendors agreed with a new system of assigning booth space for seasonal vendors rather than the original first come-first served approach.
- Our season long market fee was a low \$25 helping to make this a profitable and attractive venture for vendors while generating revenue that was put back into building the market.

Goals 2:

Enhance transparency & relationship between vendors /consumers

We wanted this goal to lead to two specific outcomes: 1) Consumer awareness of growers and growing conditions is raised, and 2) Demand increases for locally produced, organic produce. In 2010, we circulated a survey to residents about local foods issues and 88 people responded. In Fall 2011, we posted a survey about local foods issues and we had 114 respondents, or more than a 25% increase.

One of the best success stories of the program period is the connection made between the Student Conservation Association (SCA) station and a market vendor. During the 2011 season, the SCA approached the vendor about contracting produce for the 18-person crew for the 2012 season. The vendor is now investing in cold frames and greenhouse materials to extend his growing season and provide produce for the organization from June until October. Other activities and evidence of this goal being accomplished include:

- A Facebook page and webpage was created for the Lemhi County Farmers Market.
- Vendor sheets were created that gave the shopper at-a-glance information on vendor growing practices.
- Workshops were held that included a solar oven demonstration, weaving demonstration using wool from local sheep, leaf garden workshop, and sustainability demonstrations aboard the Dartmouth College “Big Green Bus”. The Big Green Bus runs on used vegetable oil and refueled on vegetable oil from a downtown restaurant.
- Cooking demonstrations by the Odd Fellows Bakery utilized in-season produce. Vendors from the Odd Fellows Bakery also educated consumers about their use of wild yeasts and other locally available ingredients. Beekeepers were on hand to talk to consumers about what was in bloom, and how Lemhi County bees are faring compared to declines nationwide.
- SVS purchased a freezer that provides an option for direct-sell meat products to be transferred to the consumer at the office of our partner, Lemhi Regional Land Trust.
- In Spring 2011, SVS involved farmers market vendors and the market manager in the Salmon Local Foods working group that drafted an action plan to strengthen our local food network. Vendors advocated for community education to help residents understand better how to cook and preserve fresh produce based on conversations they had with customers; in 2012 a series of 12 workshops are planned.
- A barter board was created for both consumers and producers to accommodate those local producers who were offering things like u-pick cherries or direct-sell meat. Consumers also used the board to make producers aware of demands for local services and products: “looking for two tons of grass hay”, “will pay to use an apple press,” “goat milk wanted,” etc. The board was extremely popular and demonstrated a low-technology method of making connections between vendor and consumer.



- Expanded our market hours and days to coincide with the Salmon River Days (July) and the Salmon Marathon (September). For Salmon River Days Street Fair, we added a Friday market and joined the Salmon Valley Chamber of Commerce vendors in a market twice the size of normal. For the Salmon Marathon we included coupons flyers in the runners' bags to increase traffic to our market and added a Friday market to coincide with the runner registration. The majority of vendors reported that the Salmon River Days event (over the 4th of July weekend) was their highest-grossing market weekend.
- Throughout the year we did the local radio talk show "Voice of the Valley" to get the word out on special events taking place at our market. The local station, KSRA, also provided countless public service announcements to let the public know of market produce availability and special events.
- For National Farmers Market Week we worked in conjunction with the Idaho Department of Agriculture to distribute free, re-useable market totes and participated in statewide marketing for the event.
- We made efforts to make it as easy as possible to have all available produce and food products in the area make a showing at the market. Salmon Valley Stewardship employees and board members took turns volunteering on Saturdays to sell vegetables, fruits, and especially eggs on behalf of producers. A few of our regular market vendors also offered to sell produce for those unable to stay at the market all day.

Beneficiaries:

Vendors/Producers: Nearly all of the agricultural operations in Lemhi County are small, family-owned and operated businesses. In 2006, the average value of agricultural products sold per farm was \$55,914 while average total farm production expenses per farm were \$53,557 – or average net revenue of \$2,357.

Bureau of Economic Analysis statistics show that from 1969 to 2008, Salmon and Lemhi County's per capita income consistently trailed the State of Idaho's, which in turn trailed the nation. In 2009, the median household income in the county was \$36,423, about 76% of the state median household income. Idaho Department of Labor reported an 11.1% unemployment rate in June 2011, despite the addition of seasonal recreation, ranching, and forestry jobs. The number of agriculture jobs in the county continues to decrease dramatically, down nearly 50% from 1999. Unfortunately, many of the farmers, ranchers, and farmers market vendors in our community qualify as low-income households. At least 10% of our farmers market vendors are disabled. The money they earn each week at the Farmers Market supplements their very limited income, for example, pictured above is "The Cookie Lady", an disabled low income full time market vendor.



The Lemhi County Farmers Market succeeded in providing direct benefit to at least 40 food producers in the area. The indirect benefits remain to be calculated but the demonstrated demand for locally produced food has caught the attention of many established food producers in the area, as well as the attention of people now considering food production as a future career or supplement to other work.

Farmers Market Manager: The idea of creating a very part-time job in a remote Idaho outpost might not sound that important, but it has proven to be extremely important to our community. Funding in 2010 allowed us to hire the person who in 2009 volunteered all her time to the market. The part-time income made it possible for this person to pursue her B.A. in nutrition. In 2010, she attended the Idaho Summit on Hunger & Food Insecurity and was instrumental in discussions about starting a statewide Idaho Farmers Market Association. The combination of education and experience made it possible for her to be hired in her field of nutrition when she transferred with her family to Colorado. In 2011, we hired an individual who was part-owner of an upstart bakery in town, but who needed to supplement her income, as many startup business owners do. The complementary jobs created a unique synergy that benefitted our employee as well as her business, which is extremely dedicated to incorporating local foods into their products and retail line.

We anticipated we would benefit the following organizations: Salmon Valley Stewardship, Lemhi Regional Land Trust, Salmon Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Idaho Extension Office. In fact, we ended up affecting many more organizations than we had imagined. As mentioned in previous sections, in the Spring of 2011 we worked with many sectors in the community to create a Local Food Action Plan. With the Lemhi County Farmers Market serving as an example of success, the diverse group of stakeholders were able to envision a vibrant local foods culture. Additional partners now include the Youth Employment Program, the Sacajawea Center Community Garden, Salmon High School and the FFA Club, the Lemhi County Economic Development Association, and church organizations. Many other organizations have used the Farmers Market as a way to promote events or raise funds, such as the local educational sorority that holds a pumpkin patch at the market in October. In 2011, University of Idaho and Idaho Rural Partnership hosted the annual Idaho Rural Conference in Boise and our market manager was chosen as one of the sponsored participants from Salmon to attend. The conference theme, Backyard Innovation “Learn what works”, showcased innovative approaches to challenging problems found throughout rural Idaho. One of the sessions, Idaho’s local food systems: Yesterday and tomorrow, talked about strategies to encourage local food production and marketing. This session featured highlights from “2011: The Year of Idaho Food,” showcasing how communities are re-connecting to local food production and value-added agriculture”.

Both our farmer market manager and our program assistant were able to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet in person the faces behind the Farmers Market Promotional granters. The two-day session provided an opportunity, in a conference setting, to learn the in and outs of this grant. They were thrilled to experience D.C. and also meet and talk to their peers about local food networks.

Lessons learned:

We used the consensus decision making model to give vendor ownership of the market. When first come first served booth space was not meeting the needs of the market we created a map and had the vendors pick assigned spots. Length of market and days and time of market was determined by vendors. This created a shared desire for the market to be successful and problems solved.

The barter board allowed local producers to direct sell live animals for meat to have a venue at the Farmers Market without needing to go to the expense and regulatory barriers of USDA meat processing standards. This provided a low-tech solution to what was proving to be a frustrating situation.

Perhaps most importantly, the Lemhi County Farmers Market has informed the community about definite challenges and opportunities. The disappointment over lack of produce in May and June has created rational discussion about the need for greenhouses, cold frames, and other methods of extending the growing season. The rush for eggs every Saturday has increased an interest in raising poultry in the Salmon River Valley, with the realization that supply is outstripped by demand. The overabundance of produce in the early fall has created a realization that many people do not know how to can, freeze, dry or otherwise preserve produce. As a community we are better prepared to deal with these challenges and capitalize on the opportunities than we were at the beginning of the grant.



