The **Historic Lower 9th Ward Council for Arts and Sustainability** of New Orleans**,** LA received $39,417 to purchase equipment, signage, and supplies; develop an advertising and promotional campaign; and establish a new EBT program at the new Sankofa Lower 9th Ward Farmers Market.

Final Report FY10

Final Report
Agreement # 12-25-G-1155
Funds: $39,417

Project Summary

The Sankofa Farmers Market (SFM) was launched on November 20, 2010 to address the need for increased access to fresh food in the Ninth Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana, a low socio-economic neighborhood, designated as a food desert area. The closest supermarket to the neighborhood is 2.6 miles away, nearly double the average neighborhood-to-supermarket distance in New Orleans. Studies have shown that this lack of affordable food directly contributes to higher rates of chronic disease in these communities. The SFM began in 2010 in the Ninth Ward and has developed into a consistent community hub that frequents shoppers from the neighborhood and surrounding areas. It was developed in response to requests from many Lower Ninth Ward residents who expressed the need for better access to fresh produce. The SFM continues to work to increase access and affordability of fresh produce to the Ninth Ward area. Since its inception, the SFM has accepted SNAP benefits and maintains a consistent presence in the neighborhood as a weekly retail outlet for fresh food.

Project Approach

Outreach was a major strategy used to promote the SFM to area residents. Various strategies are utilized to directly promote the SFM to the community. Meetings were organized with community-based organizations to discuss the goals and objectives of the program. Additionally, promotional materials were developed to advertise the SFM to the public through a marketing campaign that utilizes social media, grassroots outreach, and advertisements. The customer base for the SFM was also increased through a raffle program at the weekly event, through which the winning contestant would be awarded a basket of fresh produce and market products from the vendors. Communications strategies also included radio and television appearances to discuss the challenges of access to fresh food in the Ninth Ward area. Weekly e-blasts were created using constant contact to new and recurring customers. Coupons were also

disseminated throughout local publications to invite new customers to the SFM and provide them with free tokens for purchases.

An additional strategy to increase customers was the Veggie Dollars Program (VDP), a fruit and vegetable incentive program created to improve access and affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables to low income seniors and families with children. The Veggie Dollars were distributed in the form of tokens that could only be used for fruits and vegetables at the SFM. Most participants were selected through their memberships with community centers and churches. Participants completed an application form to enroll in the VDP.

Project Results

The SFM launched in August 2010 with a total of seven vendors, comprised of two produce and five value-added product vendors. Total sales amounts remained at an average of $150.00 for the first 12 months of activity, with an average customer attendance of 80 people. In order to support the commercial viability of the SFM, the location was moved to about 10 blocks east from its initial area during November 2011. This enabled the SFM to reach a broader customer base and provide a venue that increased vendor product sales. By December 2011, the total number of marketgoers who attended, as well as total sales per month, doubled to an average of $170 and $300, respectively. An EBT machine has been used to accept SNAP benefits at the SFM since its inception. Credit/ debit card purchases have also been accepted through a token exchange system. The yearly totals for 2011 were $15,480.00, with $3,794.00 of the sales being SNAP benefit transactions and $8,161.00 being credit/debit sales. The remaining sales were cash purchases directly to the vendors. Income was also generated at the market through beverage sales which totaled $961.52 for 2011. The VDP was initially launched on December 10, 2011, during which SNAP transactions at the SFM doubled.

Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of this project are residents of the Ninth Ward who have direct access to fresh fruits and vegetables each week. The SFM locations were identified through partnerships with community based organizations, schools, and churches. The various locations of the SFM included All Souls Episcopal Church and Community Center, the Holy Angels Complex, and ARISE Academy. We also met with various neighborhood organizations and community based groups. Outreach was also conducted to neighborhood residents to ensure that direct communication was conducted to beneficiaries.

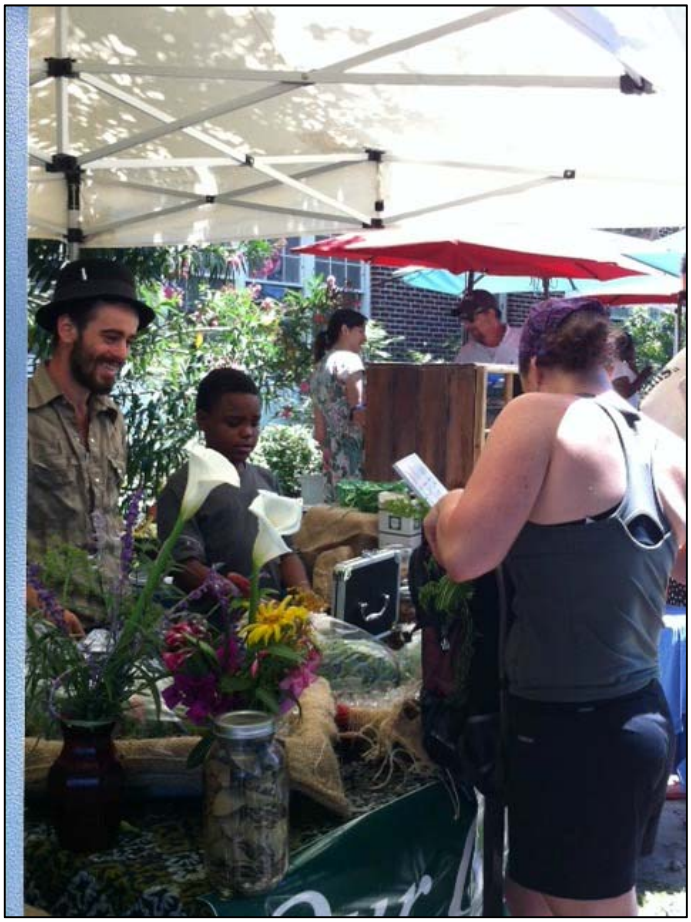
Lessons Learned

There were numerous lessons learned from this project, including outreach and communications, leadership, location, financing, and evaluation.

1) Communications and marketing has been critical to growth of the SFM. Outreach is significant to the development of a neighborhood market. Door- to-door fliering in the neighborhood where the SFM is located with incentives has also been an effective tool to draw people to the weekly event. Additionally, direct engagement with residents of the area encourages authentic relationships with community members enable a farmers market to build its customer base. In addition to grass roots outreach, advertising for the SFM also includes social media, print ads, and signage.

2) The SFM developed a market advisory committee to provide objective support on the market manager on the identification of new products and vendors. The advisory committee included a diverse pool of people, including community members, public health workers, and market vendors. The roles and responsibilities of the market planning committee members ensure that everyone understands their purpose in the group.

3) A budget was created to identify the expenses for the market and allocate to various parts of the program. Our budget included both start-up and recurring expenses. Start-up costs include tents, tables, signage, EBT machine, wooden tokens, and office supplies. Recurring expenses include salaries for the market manager and assistant, accounting costs for EBT processing, office supplies, and materials for concession sales. In addition to start-up funding from the USDA – FMPP program, additional revenue for the program was provided from private foundations, booth fees, and concession sales.



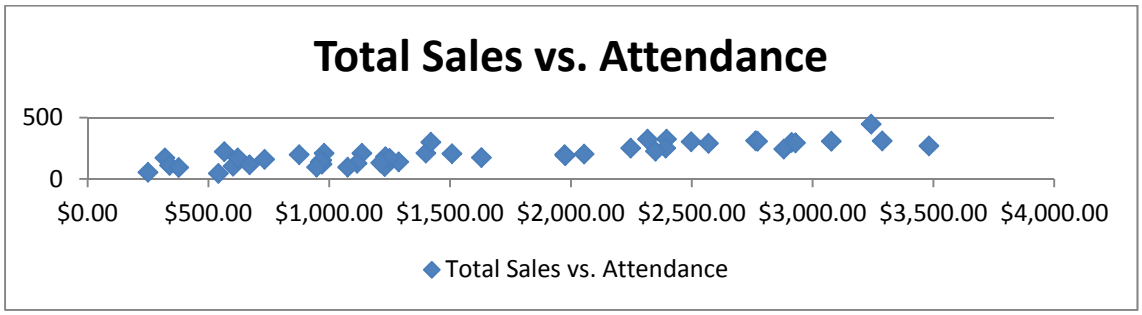
4) A clear work plan was developed to ensure that the project schedule is followed, with a task list. The work plan enabled the market manager and staff to be clear about the tasks that need to be completed within a project management schedule.

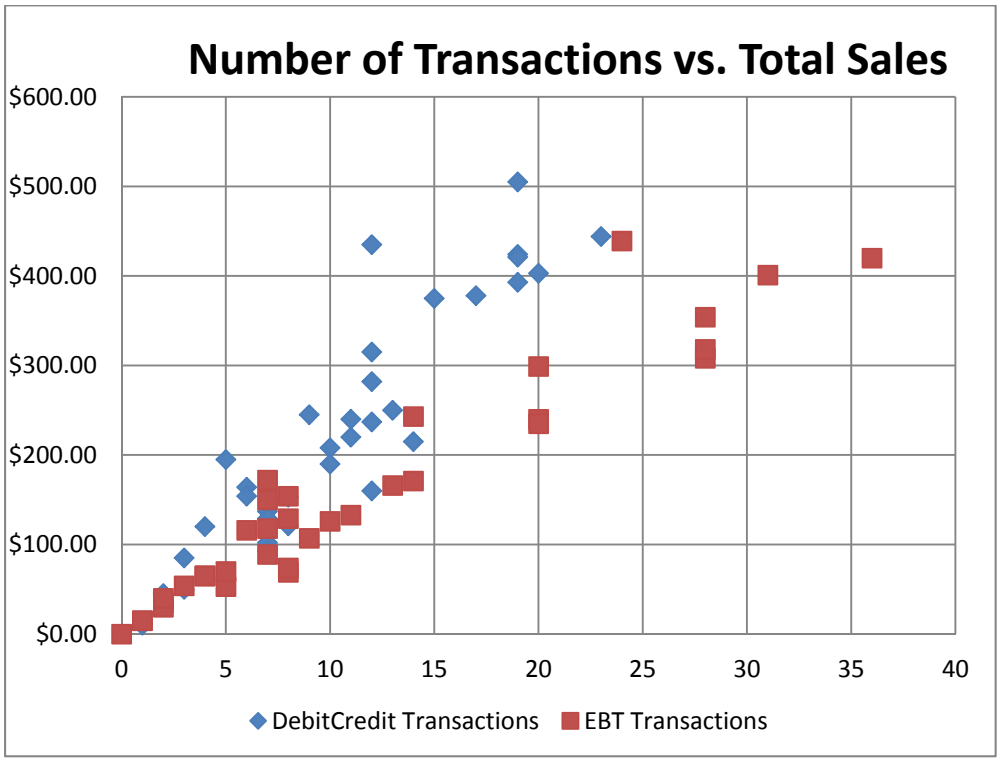
5) Adequate staffing with clearly outlined job descriptions was significant. As a project of Sankofa CDC, the SFM was an entity within an agency with a team of staff with various responsibilities. A solid, competent market manager with administrative and project management experience, as well as a market

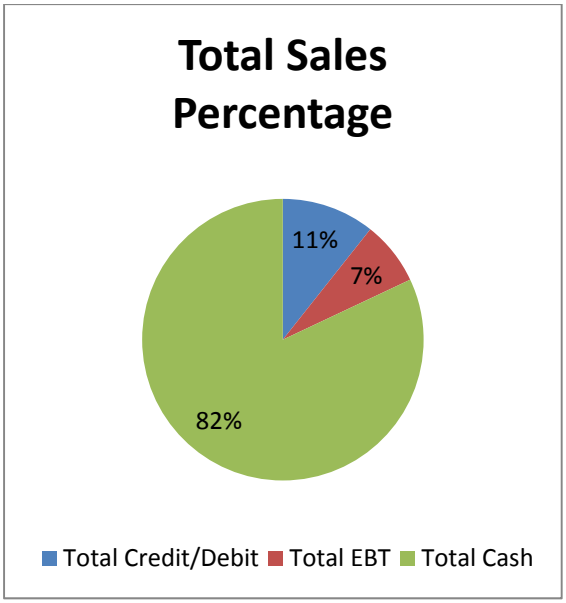
assistant is needed for the market operation to run efficiently. Additional volunteer assistants are helpful as well.

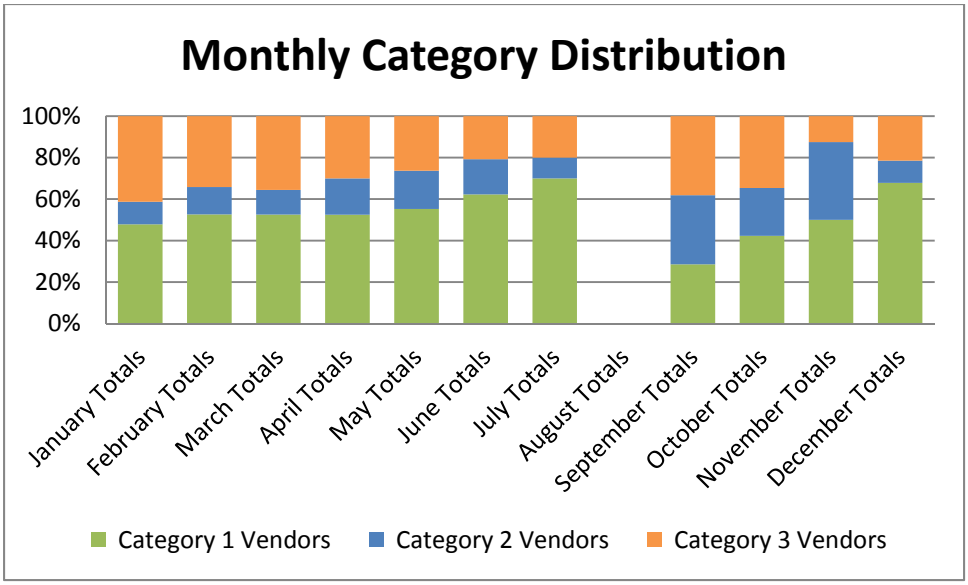
6) Location was important to the success of the SFM. The locations selected included considerations for visibility, a space where there is familiar to the community, and an area that coincides with the mission of the organization. We intentionally located the SMF on St Claude Ave, a major thoroughfare in the Ninth Ward area, for all three of the market's locations. This enabled us to maintain consistent visibility for residents of the area, as well as passerby traffic. Consideration was also given to the SFM's proximity to our community-based partners, churches, senior living centers, and schools for the final decision on the location.

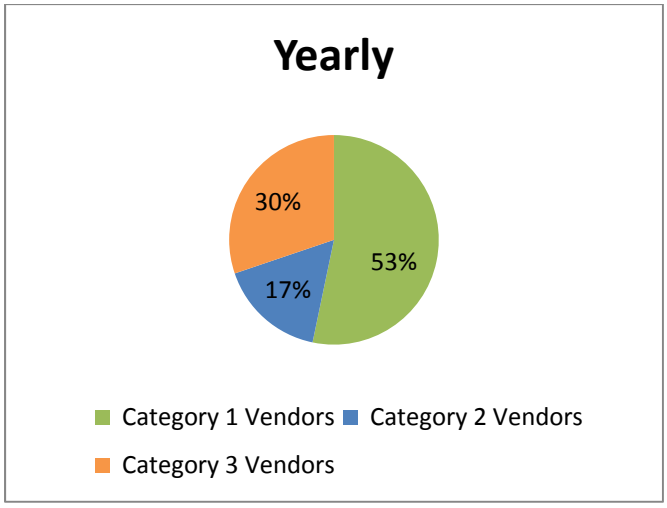
7) Assessments and evaluations of the SFM were used to identify successes, as well as setbacks that we needed to improve upon. Data was collected at each weekly market to assess market needs, customer and vendor experiences, and next steps for future development. Statistical data collected during the market reflected comparisons and contrasts of total gross sales vs. attendance; comparisons of credit/debit sales to EBT transactions; and product categories.






Total Sales Percentage
11%
7%
82%
Total Credit/Debit
Total EBT
Total Cash


Monthly Category Distribution
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
January Totals
February Totals
March Totals
April Totals
May Totals
June Totals
July Totals
August Totals
September Totals
October Totals
November Totals
December Totals
Category 1 Vendors
Category 2 Vendors
Category 3 Vendors


Yearly
30%
53%
17%
Category 1 Vendors
Category 2 Vendors
Category 3 Vendors

8) We identified both our short and long term goals for the SFM during its planning. Our short term goals, within a 6 month to 1 year span, included customer attendance numbers, diversity of products, and gross sales amounts. Our long term goals also included these factors, as well as market growth and generation of market revenue, and the community being aware of our brand.

9) Lastly, we found that solid relationships with vendors were important for the success and longevity of the SFM. Developing good rapport with the vendors encourages their investment in the market and their commitment to its mission. We held formal meetings with vendors to address their concerns and provide a platform for them to communicate their needs. The market manager also visited the vendors' farms and production spaces to further build relationships.

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