

From Farm to Market

Washington Hancock Community Agency of Milbridge, ME received \$70,551 to train farmers, market managers and vendors from the 10 farmers markets in Washington County, Maine. Funds were used to put on training conferences and provide individual training to market management and participants.

Final Report



Supporting Maine's Small Businesses

Farmers' Market Promotion Project Final Report

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With our FMPP grant, Down East Business Alliance (DBA) has been working with farmers' markets in Washington and Hancock counties. We have used a combination of training, technical assistance, and stipends to markets to help them increase their marketing efforts and strengthen their markets. We are proud of our many accomplishments over the period of the grant, we have accomplished more than we expected, and we can see lasting affects not only on the markets in our area, but on markets throughout the state of Maine.

Our original proposal indicated that we would provide workshops for farmers' market manager and vendors in the two counties to provide them with enhanced business and marketing skills. As we worked to develop these workshops, it became clear to us that the most effective way to deliver the wide variety of workshops to many people would be to organize a convention format. We did this in March, 2009. It was a great success, with almost 50 farmers and vendors attending. The response to that was so positive, that we decided to do it again in 2010. The second convention was bigger and better than the first one, with over 80 participants. One of the outcomes of the second convention was a group of farmers who were willing to work to organize a state-wide farmers' market association. They have asked for our help in coordinating this effort and we are pleased to be able to offer our assistance. For more information on the nuts and bolts of the convention, please see the report on the second annual Maine Farmers' Market Convention. (Tab 2)



In addition to the workshops and training offered at the convention, DBA staff provided ongoing individual market technical assistance to the markets in our counties. We also offered more in depth, hands on technical assistance to two markets identified in our original proposal as markets which could benefit from this enhanced technical assistance. In Hancock County, our staff person, Jeff Ackerman, worked with the Ellsworth Farmers' Market. In Washington County, our staff person is Elizabeth Sprague, and she worked with the Machias Market. Each market experiences different stresses and has different strengths.



In Ellsworth, the market has been in operation for over 20 years. It has one strong anchor farmer with a loyal following. However, it had been bounced all over town, and is currently in different locations on Saturdays than it is on weekdays. The weekday location is secure but not ideal. The Saturday location has good visibility but is small and the neighboring businesses are unhappy having the market there. Market shoppers had dwindled down to those who knew how to find the farmer, and the vendor participation was shrinking accordingly. The market was stable, but not strong, vibrant, and growing. Jeff worked with Paul, the farmer, and Gunjan, the manager, to determine if there was a more ideal location, and how to attract more customers and

vendors. This work spanned the entire length of the program, and will probably go on into the future. Jeff attended market meetings as well as working directly with the manager. He got them thinking about their locations and the benefits and problems with them. He got them thinking about how to let people know about the market, and get them to want to come to the market. The result was that the market added some vendors to the Saturday market, and explored different offers for space, but decided not to move anywhere. They did design some new brochures and bumper stickers, and they did benefit from some new ads in the local paper. You can learn more about the Ellsworth market at <http://ellsworthfarmersmarket.com>.

The Machias market is in a small but very visible location. The managers are happy with it and have no intention of changing that. In fact, Elizabeth found that they had no intention of changing anything, and so her first work was with them to guide them to the idea that things could be different.

The market had been in existence for decades, with a few anchor farmers. Shortly before we began this project, one of the main vendors passed away. His wife was uncertain as to how much farming she could do, but she still wanted to be a market manager. The other anchor farmer discovered she had serious health issues, and so her participation would be limited.

Elizabeth worked hard for a year to bring these two ladies around to a point where they realized the need for by-laws and additional vendors. She still is working on the idea of regular hours and a larger space.

In the meantime, Elizabeth has worked with the market to run paid advertising in the local paper each week, to obtain tents and tables to make it easier for fledgling vendors to join the market, to hold new vendor meetings with potential vendors. Attendance by vendors and shoppers at the market did show signs of increasing this year.

Elizabeth was pleased to hear the news following this year's market meeting that they were instituting many of the changes that she had been instrumental in working on over the span of the project. She felt like they finally understood how these changes could benefit the market as a whole. Among other things, while they still will allow vendors to sell any day they want, the market now has official hours when vendors are expected to be there, so the buying public can count on it. Additionally, vendors have been asked to commit to regular hours, and this information is posted on the website and the Face Book page. For more information about the market, check out their web-site at www.machiasvalleyfarmersmarket.com or their Face Book page at Friends of Machias Valley Farmers Market.



Unfortunately, what we could not control was the weather. Spring and summer of 2009 were extremely wet, which not only had a negative impact on the crops, but also on attendance at markets. Even after the sun finally came out in July, there was not much produce at the markets until well into August. This hurt the markets as many shoppers don't understand the vagaries of farming; they expect the market to be robust all the time. Our work this fall and winter has been to convince the managers that the efforts they started last spring would benefit them if they continue them in the coming year.

In addition to the two markets on which we focused most of our energy, we also worked at varying levels with the other markets in the two counties. We provided funds for new signs, ads, brochures, tables, and/or tents to seven other markets. One of these, the Milbridge Market, has a website and a Face Book presence. The web-site can be found at www.milbridgefarmersmarket.webs.com and their Face Book page is Milbridge Farmers' Market. Samples of the marketing materials funded by this project can be found at Tab 7.

One market which availed itself of our service instituted its first ever "community tent". Ted Carter, manager at the Calais market told us that he wanted to find a way to directly involve the whole community in his market. He felt that having this tent would help to do this. In January at the second Maine Farmers Market Convention, he shared that this was very successful. He had community groups using the tent all season long. Using the tent gave groups such as University of Maine Cooperative Extension a way to reach out to the public to educate them or make them aware of resources and programs. And it gave community members who might not have come to the market otherwise a chance to see the market and what it was all about. Ted felt so strongly that this made an impact on his market this year that he is purchasing a second tent so that he can double the space he has available for these groups.

Jeff Ackerman was also instrumental in the creation of two new farmers markets in Hancock County, first in Castine and then in Ellsworth.



The Castine farmers' market started in the spring of 2009. With Jeff's guidance, the market created an organized plan to start up, had an advisory committee, by-laws, and developed a good partnership with the town. It had a very successful year, in spite of the poor weather. You can learn more about the Castine Market at <http://castinefarmersmarket.org/blog/>

The Woodlawn Farmers' Market in Ellsworth launched on May 9, 2010. This venture began when Jeff presented at the Rotary about the work that DBA is doing with businesses, farms and farmers' markets. Rotary member and executive director of Woodlawn, a local museum/historical site, approached Jeff with an interest in hosting a farmers market in October of 2008. As the existing Ellsworth Farmers' Market struggled with space issues over the previous year, Jeff offered Woodlawn as a solution. The managers at the Ellsworth market made no move to pursue this option. Woodlawn and DBA moved ahead when two vendors from the market contacted Jeff with the idea of creating a year-round market. They tested the waters with a "holiday market" for

December 2009 and early January 2010. Its success proved a niche had been found. The executive director and Jeff worked on creating a steering committee, developing by-laws and guidelines for a year-round market. They did not want to hurt the existing market in Ellsworth and tried several times to interest them in the project, but were unsuccessful. As they made final decisions, the Ellsworth Farmers' Market was taken into consideration (i.e. selecting a market day that does not conflict with the Ellsworth market days). As the spring approached, recruiting vendors went into full swing. Jeff was able to draw on businesses and farmers with whom he had worked in our other programs to help find vendors. At their first vendor meeting, facilitated by a professional development consultant, the Ellsworth market managers and vendors were invited to participate. This step uncovered some animosity on the part of the current market vendors, and Jeff and the executive director met with them to mend fences, and sort things out. They gently reminded them that they had tried for a year to coordinate with the current managers, but were never given any indication that there was interest. Jeff had even told them that the museum really wanted a market and would have one, one way or the other, but they had forgotten that, until he reminded them.

The new market opened on Mother's Day, 2010. It was a cold, very windy, rainy day, and there was no vegetable produce that early in the season. However, there were approximately 20 vendors, and almost 200 people attended the market. Shoppers were able to buy meat, bread, cheese, smoked fish, seafood, cookies and other baked goods, baking mixes, aprons, pottery, wooden bowls, jewelry, and woven goods. There was a weaving display and many good foods to sample. There were even wool filled comforters for sale.



The amazing part was that there was no paid advertising for the market. News of the Woodlawn Farmers' Market was put out through DBA's email contacts and the Woodlawn's contact list including Woodlawn's weekly on-line newsletter which featured the upcoming market. Both of the major local newspapers had reporters on site for the first day. There were signs out at the road and at major intersections in the area, directing people to the market.

The vendors did a professional job displaying their goods, in spite of the wind and rain, and they were very happy with the results. The market patrons gave very positive feedback about the event which showed in the good attendance that the market had, with many repeat shoppers the following Sunday.

All of this activity is very fun and exciting for us. But it is not all that we did over the course of the project. Last summer we also operated four Rapid Market Assessments of local farmers' markets. These assessments are based on a methodology developed by the University of Oregon's Cooperative Extension. Essentially, you formulate four or five questions that can be answered "Yes" or "No", and write them on flip charts. You give participants dots and ask them to place the dot on the correct answer to the question. It is

fun for the participants, and can give the market good information about who was shopping that day.

We have developed an additional twist to this – we give the participants sets of dots with discrete numbers on each set. In this way, we can further analyze the responses given. In other words, we can tell how people who traveled 10 miles responded, as opposed to those who traveled 5 miles. We can sort the data in any number of ways to determine what areas the market managers should be focused on, depending on who they wanted to serve. For instance, in Milbridge, we were surprised and happy to note that seasonal visitors to the area visit the market weekly while they are in town, and generally spend between \$20-\$40. Items they were looking for and did not find were eggs and seafood, as well as berries other than blueberries. The Milbridge market can use this information to determine which new vendors to attract, and can also use the information to inform the new vendors what to expect from the shoppers.



The markets we surveyed were Machias, Bar Harbor, Milbridge, and Winter Harbor. It took us a long time to wade through the data, but eventually this winter we completed reports for each market based on their own data. We delivered these reports to the markets prior to their annual meetings so that they could incorporate the information in their plans for this year. These reports are located at Tabs 3-6.

As we complete this grant cycle we look back at the whole body of work, and find it amazing how far we have come. Our involvement in the management of local farmers' markets prior to receiving this funding was constrained by funding limitations. We had contacts at the markets, and offered limited advice. Through this program we have been able to help local markets become stronger organizations, and to see their pathway to growth. Each market has different strengths and challenges, and we have been able to be very adaptive in how we work with them. We worked very hard creating the convention, and are well pleased with the way it has taken off as a source of information for farmers' market managers and vendors. The fact that the idea of a statewide organization was born at the convention this year is a source of pride to us. Because of our involvement with the markets over the last eighteen months, and because of our work at the convention, two different sets of people who wanted to start markets contacted us to help them do that. As the icing on the cake, we have been asked to speak, as experts on farmers' markets, at a meeting sponsored by the Washington-Hancock Farm Bureau. This meeting is being held to determine what role the Farm Bureau can play in the growing Farmers' Market movement. While we are not policy advocates, they have that strength, and so we feel that this may be a strong partnership in the future, as we are able to provide them with information on the issues that farmers markets face in our two counties. We look forward to continuing this work well into the future.

Farm to Table

Year-round Farmers Market Opens at Woodlawn

By JACQUELINE WEAVER

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ELLSWORTH — The Woodlawn Farmers Market, believed to be the first year-round, outdoor market in the area, is an effort to bring the museum back to its roots.

The market first opened May 9 and will be held every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The grand opening is Father's Day, June 20.

Executive Director Joshua Torrance said the idea emerged following completion of a cultural landscape report that showed Woodlawn, home to three generations of the Col. John Black family, had been a gentleman's farm with significant agricultural activity.

"John Black had 40 apple trees, hundreds of cabbages and chickens," said Torrance. "We also know that some of the best soil in Hancock County is up at the Woodlawn. The upper field has a special soil mix that is somewhat rare in Hancock County."

Cultural landscapes can range from thousands of acres of land to a small homestead with a front yard of less than one acre.

Like historic buildings and districts, these special places reveal aspects of a country's origins and development through their form and features and the ways in which they were used.

Torrance said the museum staff met with experts in sustainable agriculture and the subject of a farmers market came up.

Over a year ago he took up the matter with Jeff Ackerman, Hancock County small business coordinator for the Down East Business Alliance.

Ackerman was speaking at the noontime Rotary Club meeting in Ellsworth about a variety of projects, including one promoting farmers markets in Washington and Hancock counties.

Torrance was there, the two talked, and the rest is happening at Woodlawn on Sundays.

Sundays were selected to avoid competing with other outdoor markets.

"We feel we're just adding another venue," said Torrance. "We want to be supportive and work with all of the other markets."

The current plan is to be open year-round, but with fewer vendors in the winter since they will have to be housed in the sleigh barn for the time being.

Ackerman said berries and other produce should be available soon.

He said the goal is a well thought out, year-round market that will feature produce seasonally and well beyond summer.

"In the fall, at the tail end of the season, I expect we'll have fruit and root vegetables that will carry well into the off season," he said.

He said farmers markets are an emerging market and their appeal is largely consumers' growing desire to buy their food locally.

The market currently has 18 vendors and has room for 20-25.

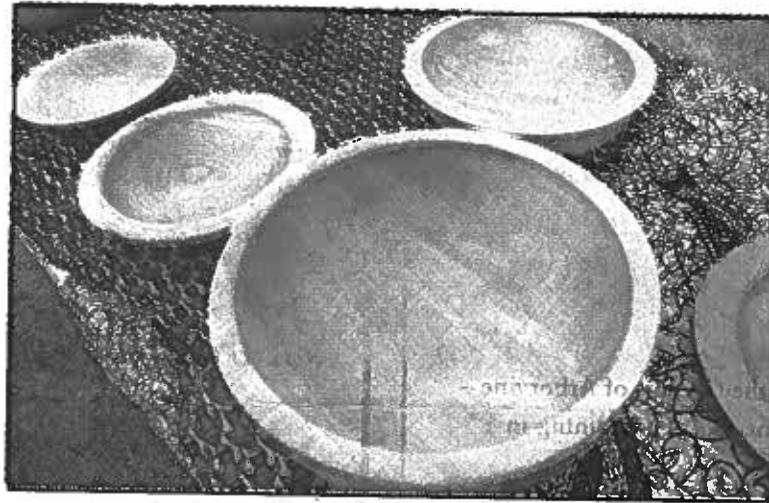
Ackerman said they hope for a mix of 80 percent food producers and 20 percent artwork.

"What we're also hoping with prepared foods is that people will go to the Woodlawn, enjoy the trails and the Black House, and maybe even bring a blanket, buy some picnic food and have a picnic right there."

Vendors currently include the Cookie Nook Bakery, Jorge's Garlic/Jc Turnings, Gravelwood Farm, Nostrano, Stu and Deb's Woodturning, Smith's Log Smokehouse, Auntie Lynn's, Little Red Hen Baked Goods, Goodnight Farm, Salt Pond Designs, Pottery, Art & Writing Studio, Tidal Weave, Appleton Ridge Tapestry, Harmony Mill Farm, Millbrook Co. Inc., North Country Comforters, D. G. Photo and Bagaduce Farm.

Torrance said the turnout has been "tremendous" with 100-150 people coming in a steady stream all day.

Among the special features on Father's Day will be a live remote broadcast. Farmers also will be asked to bring a single animal from their livestock.



At Woodlawn, the aim is to have most of the vendors selling food although there also are several who produce artistic and useful pieces.



Inside the sleigh barn are several vendors, including this baker with a variety of cheesecakes among other sweet treats.





ELLSWORTH AMERICAN PHOTOS BY JACQUELINE WEAVER

At the Woodlawn Farmers Market, one vendor offers hot coffee, pastry and fresh bread, the better to nosh while circulating from one stall to another. See more photos at www.fenceviewer.com

Farm to Table

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