

FY 2012 - Cultivating Community

\$96,204 to Cultivating Community, Portland, ME, to create and promote six farm stands in low-income areas that accept Federal nutrition benefits by: 1) training refugee growers and vendors; 2) procuring EBT terminals and basic infrastructure for the stands; and 3) marketing the farm stands with targeted outreach, promotional materials, and advertising programs.

[Final Report](#)

2012 Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report
For the Period of September 1, 2012 – September 30, 2014

Date: December 31, 2014
Recipient Name: Cultivating Community
Project Title: "Growing Access, Growing Communities: Connecting Federal Nutrition Benefits Recipients to Low-Resource Refugee Farmers at New and Existing EBT/WIC-Accessible Farm Stands in Maine's Population Centers"
Grant Number: 12-25-G-1578
Project Location: Portland, ME
Amount Awarded: \$96,204
Contact: Craig Lapine / 207-761-4769 / craig@cultivatingcommunity.org

Program Summary:

Cultivating Community, in collaboration with Fresh Start Farms, worked with Opportunity Alliance, Preble Street and the Maine Hunger Initiative, Healthy Portland, the Portland Housing Authority, and SNAP Ed, among others, to address food insecurity in Maine's population centers. This project, "Growing Access, Growing Communities," increased access to healthy, locally grown food for federal nutrition benefits recipients by promoting farm stands that accepted federal nutrition benefits to people with low incomes, providing nutrition education around healthy recipes and food preparation, and establishing food access points in diverse, low income neighborhoods. This project increased farm stand revenue by 300% from 2012-2014, supporting 30 immigrant and refugee farmers by expanding their customer base, promoting direct marketing opportunities, supplying infrastructure, outreach materials and technical assistance, and providing marketing training to build greater self-sufficiency. A total of \$83,000 of fresh, local vegetables were distributed to 3,200 Maine residents through "Growing Access, Growing Communities" during the grant period.

Goals and Objectives:

Our scope was to create and promote six farm stands in low-income areas that accept Federal nutrition benefits by: 1) training refugee growers and vendors; 2) procuring EBT terminals and basic infrastructure for the stands; and 3) marketing the farm stands with targeted outreach, promotional materials, and advertising programs.

There was a great need in our community prior to the implementation of our project. "Growing Access, Growing Communities" was the only regional initiative focused on creating access to locally grown produce to SNAP recipients. The Campaign to Promote Food Security in Cumberland County (CPFSC) 2010 report highlighted food insecurity and barriers to food access, noting Maine as the most food insecure state in New England, the ninth in the United States, and the state with the second highest rate of very low food security in the country.

Maine Department of Health and Human Services reported a 30% rise in SNAP recipients in Maine from 2008 to 2010, with Portland comprising 16% of all SNAP cases statewide. Twenty percent of all Mainers fed their families with some type of nutritional benefit (SNAP, WIC, General Assistance, etc.). \$31 million in SNAP benefits flowed into Maine each month, yet only 0.077% of those dollars were spent at farmers' markets and farm stands—this despite the fact that many Maine communities had year-round farmers' markets. There was considerable potential for farm stands to increase sales to federal benefit recipients by establishing strategically-placed and community-endorsed markets in areas with high concentrations of low food security. Our farm stands accepted SNAP, WIC, and SFMNP (Senior Farm Share in Maine) benefits, doubling most of those dollars with incentives to encourage new customers to increase their healthy food consumption.

Activities:

- 1. Held meetings with stakeholders, including Opportunity Alliance, Preble Street and the Maine Hunger Initiative, Western Maine Community Action, Healthy Portland, AVESTA Housing, Portland Public Schools, and SNAP Ed (formerly through Cooperative Extension and now through the University of New England), among others, and target farm stand managers/assistants. Planned for implementation of EBT redemption capacities at 6+ farm stand sites.*
- 2. Designed and built mobile farm stand (The Grow Cart) with support from the Maine College of Art's public engagement program, in order to transport and display vegetables at market.*
- 3. Prepared lease applications for six EBT machines, and purchased associated infrastructure (including truck trailer cart frame, lumber and hardware, display boxes, coolers, and paint; cooking demonstration supplies, additional supplies as needed) for the Grow Cart and each farm stand site.*
- 4. Provided training and technical assistance to low-resource farmers (Fresh Start Farms growers) enrolled in Cultivating Community's refugee farmer training program, the New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP).*
- 5. Created and reproduced outreach and promotional materials, including flyers, signage, sandwich boards, social media notices, and email announcements about new EBT capacity at targeted farm stands. Translated materials through Catholic Charities' translation and interpretation department.*
- 6. Met with outreach partners (those mentioned above in #1, plus Portland Housing Authority, Maine Med's Family Practice, Portland Community Health Center, Learning Works, Portland Adult Education, and St. Luke's Cathedral) to distribute outreach and promotional materials. Posted promotional materials broadly. Participated at outreach events by community partners to reach target consumers.*
- 7. Provided capacity-building and marketing training to farmers in Fresh Start Farms, who are participants in Cultivating Community's NASAP program.*
- 8. Assisted farm stand managers with EBT implementation and provided trouble-shooting as needed on-site during farm stand days. Implemented cooking demonstrations/nutrition education activities with support from Healthy Portland and SNAP Ed.*
- 9. Collected and analyzed data regarding number of EBT/credit transactions at each farm stand. Tracked attendance and dollar amount of sales at each farm stand. Conducted farm stand customer surveys about EBT usage and vegetable consumption habits.*
- 10. Attended Maine Farmers' Market Association Convention. Networked with local/regional/statewide organizations, especially those who worked with people with low incomes.*
- 11. Developed evaluation tools, surveyed participants, and evaluated the data and the project.*

Accomplishments:

- *From 2012-2014, twelve neighborhood urban farm stands were established at two schools, two WIC-issuing agencies, a community resource hub, a food market, an inner-city park, neighborhood corners/streets, a community garden/public housing development, a YMCA, a community health center, and a church. In 2012, there were five markets, all located in Portland; in 2014, we established markets in Portland, South Portland, Lewiston, and Auburn. We implemented stationary farm stands and mobile farm stand sites (through our Grow Cart). All markets were equipped to process EBT and WIC transactions and provided a 50% discount incentive for low-income shoppers; several also featured healthy cooking demonstrations provided by SNAP-Educators.*
- *Over the course of the grant period, 3,200 Southern Maine residents received over \$83,500 in fresh, locally-grown produce. Over half of these vegetables were distributed in low income neighborhoods, and to 1,125 SNAP and WIC recipients at our farm stands, 90 seniors enrolled in Senior Farm Share, 15 residents at a recovery and rehabilitation center, and 18 members of our low-income CSA program. In 2012, we sold \$9,568 in fresh vegetables to 650 people; in 2013, we sold \$16,697 to 1630 people; in 2014, we sold \$27,825 to 1660 people. This represents growth of nearly 300%.*
- *By participating in our food access initiatives, 30 immigrant and refugee farmers gained a steady source of income and improved their efficiency and marketing capacity. Farmers received training for record keeping, customer service, pricing, display-making, U.S. customer expectations, and EBT/WIC vendor applications. Nine farmers graduated from our farmer training program in 2013 and while they are still accessing our marketing services, they are now seeking their own farmland and have begun to sell under their own family farm name.*
- *From 2012-2014, ninety low-income seniors in Portland received \$6,900 in weekly produce deliveries from eighty youth participants in our high school agriculture, leadership, and culinary programs. In 2013 and 2014, we expanded our impact by extending seniors' deliveries into late autumn with vegetable-based prepared foods, and engaged seniors in surveys and questionnaires to modify our program and to improve their experience.*
- *CC and Fresh Start Farms collaborated on 5,000+ outreach materials. CC interviewed and photographed farmers to create individual farmer promotional flyers, bio posters and banners. CC also developed a collective cookbook showcasing farmers' and youth's stories, photos, preparation techniques, and ethnic recipes from Somalia, Sudan, Guatemala, and Mexico. The cookbook, called "Beyond the Vegetable" was a celebration of food and the people who grew it; it sold out within six months of printing.*
- *CC developed an outreach plan aimed at federal nutrition benefits recipients, which included posters, postcards, point-of-sale signage, sandwich boards, social media postings, and email write-ups promoting the market. By 2014, we had also translated our outreach materials into Somali, Arabic, Spanish, French, Khmer, and Portuguese. This will allow us to reach speakers of these languages for years to come.*
- *CC developed evaluation tools and completed a comprehensive evaluation. We tracked sales and the number of customers per market, and administered surveys regarding customer shopping patterns, vegetable consumption, outreach methods, and perceptions of the farm stand experience. We also reported data to Wholesome Wave Foundation for central data analysis through a national partnership data portal.*

Beneficiaries:

Growing Access, Growing Communities (GAGC) served a broad range of participants throughout this project:

1) We trained and worked with 30 New American farmers on four growing sites across two counties. The farmers were immigrants and refugees who brought rich agricultural traditions from their home countries to Maine, and are learning to grow food in the context of Maine's landscape and weather patterns. Through the efforts of GAGC program staff, these growers learned about US consumer preferences, created individual marketing plans suited to their interests, practiced skills in financial management and customer service in English language. Nine of these growers are now operating independently, three of which operated their own farm stands.

2) We established markets that served over 1200 SNAP and WIC recipients as the primary audience. We enrolled nine farmers in our training program as SNAP and WIC vendors, and established SNAP and WIC accessibility at all of our farm stands. We also implemented an incentive program at all of these sites to double the value of all SNAP and WIC benefits for the purchase of fresh vegetables; this allowed low income families to consume twice the amount of healthy food by making fresh produce more affordable. In 2012, SNAP/WIC purchases totaled \$9,568; in 2013 they were \$8,738 plus \$4,000 for CSA shares for low-income women in transition; in 2014 SNAP/WIC purchases were \$20,928 in addition to \$4,000 for CSA shares for low-income women in transition.

3) We trained 110 high school youth (many of whom came from immigrant or refugee families) through our programs: Youth Growers, Culinary Crew, Grow Interns, the Youth Leadership Intensive, Alumni Mentorships and garden assistantships. Youth gained a variety of skills in leadership, agriculture, stewardship, volunteerism, culinary arts, social justice and food justice. Four youth alumni with advanced leadership skills were hired as market assistants, garden assistants, and/or mentors to younger youth who were new to the program. Youth growers spent an average of one day per week on marketing activities, and youth market assistants were involved with marketing activities for 20 hours per week. The youth were particularly effective at reaching speakers of languages other than English, many of which were within a 15 minute radius from our office.

4) We provided food pantry clients with fresh, high-quality vegetables through our farm-to-pantry program. We delivered vegetables to Preble Street shelter and soup kitchen, the McAuley House (residence for women in transition), Good Shepherd Food Bank, and a network of other emergency food recipients through the Maine Hunger Initiative. There is ample evidence that these local produce deliveries to food pantries helped contribute to a societal shift in the role of food pantries and residences in providing healthy, nutritious food to food insecure populations by shifting the demand of consumers as well as the priorities of program managers. These managers reported a high degree of satisfaction from consumers, a shift in the quality and health of food consumed, and greater eagerness to get more vegetables to the people they serve. Sales to these agencies were \$12,494 in 2012, \$13,891 in 2013, and \$19,233 in 2014.

5) Cultivating Community established several low-to-no cost CSA farm share programs. We offered CSA shares at a 50% discount for SNAP recipients, allowing those members to pay for the first two weeks of each month with their EBT cards and then providing the second two weeks of vegetables for free. In 2012, we provided \$2,775 in CSA shares to 12 SNAP recipients in Portland & Lewiston. Each year, we distributed \$6,000 both in Maine Senior Farm Shares and ElderShares to 40 low income seniors and in Youth Grower shares to 25+ youth (and their families). In 2013, we provided \$2,918 in CSA shares to 12 SNAP recipients in greater Portland & Lewiston. In 2014, we provided \$1,906 in CSA shares to nine SNAP recipients in greater Portland & Lewiston. Although participation was lowest in 2014, we experienced 0% delinquency rate, which was a huge accomplishment! Our recruitment strategy emphasized the importance of a seasonal commitment, and provided ample education on what to expect from a CSA program. Although fewer people registered, everyone had a very positive experience.

Lessons Learned:

•In our outreach and market operations, we found that hiring staff that represented our beneficiaries was the most effective way of reaching target communities and creating a welcoming atmosphere. This was especially true for speakers of languages other than English, as these customers were more likely to approach the farm stand if staff spoke or looked like they spoke their language. The staff members we hired were former youth program participants; we would encourage other organizations to examine the leadership potential in their networks. This is important not only for the customers' benefit, but to provide meaningful, community-oriented jobs for people with low incomes and to send the message to your beneficiaries that your organization is willing to invest in their leadership.

•In our market site selection and sales, we were reminded of the importance of growing markets through personal relationships. Despite the often anonymous face of marketing, we found that the markets/farmers that were most successful were responsible for their own outreach. This required that they developed trust with consumers, that they learned/knew what items their customers wanted and what their customers' need and limitations were. Strong customer/farmer relationships were also more likely to affect farmers' crop planning, specifically for ethnic vegetables like African corn and African eggplant. Perhaps the truism "it's easier to keep an old customer than to make a new one" can be expanded to say "it's easier to make a customer out of a friend than a stranger."

•In our evaluation, we learned about survey administration and effective evaluation tools. We were pleased to offer a professionally-printed, full-color cookbook for customers who were willing to participate in our market survey, which helped to make the exchange feel more mutual. We decided to collect survey data on the last week of market, however in the future, we will experiment with asking one question every week or two so that customers are accustomed to the practice, so it will be quicker and involve more people, and so we can collect the most data possible. In the future, we would also like to create a cross-cultural evaluation committee to help frame the questions, the approach, and the measurements in a more culturally-appropriate way.

•In our construction of the mobile farm stand, we had started out with the idea to purchase a trailer cart (to be pulled by a car) on the way to market. We ended up partnering with two students at the Maine College of Art to custom-design and build "The Grow Cart," a tricycle-powered mobile farm stand, which was far more intricate and artistic than we had ever imagined. We would encourage other organizations to examine their networks (college students, volunteers, etc.) to identify collaborators who could help bring your project to the next level.

Due to the funding provided under FMPP:

•Our number of food access points doubled from five in 2012 to eleven in 2014.

•Our sales increased by nearly 300% from 2012 (\$9,568) to 2014 (\$27,825).

•Our number of customers increased by over 250% from 650 in 2012 to 1660 in 2014.



FARM STANDS

STARTING JULY 7, 2014

MONDAYS 1-5pm

Whole Foods Market—Portland
@ Store Front

TUESDAYS 11am-1pm

Boyd Street Urban Farm
@ Kennedy Park (Portland)

TUESDAYS 3:30-5pm

Portland YMCA
@ High Street Entrance

TUESDAYS 2-5pm

Kennedy Park (Lewiston)
@ Bates & Pine St.

WEDNESDAYS 1:30-3:30pm

Opportunity Alliance
@ 510 Cumberland Ave.

WEDNESDAYS 4-5:15pm

Portland Community Health
Center @ 180 Park Ave.

THURSDAYS 3-6pm

Redbank/Brickhill Hub
@ 584 Westbrook St.
South Portland

FRIDAYS 2:30-5:30pm

Reiche School Playground
@ Brackett St. entrance

ALL ARE WELCOME!



About our farm stands: Our farm stands are here to help make sure that all people in all neighborhoods can access, afford, and enjoy the freshest and highest quality vegetables possible. We believe in growing and sharing food that treats food producers, eaters, and the earth, with dignity. Some farm stands are stationary and some are mobile, featuring our tricycle-powered **Grow Cart!**

About the farmers: We are honored to source all farm stand produce from **Fresh Start Farms** in Lisbon and South Portland, ME. Fresh Start Farms growers are New American farmers who are building independent farm businesses in Maine. All vegetables are grown with soil health in mind and without the use of any synthetic chemicals.

About our organization: Cultivating Community is a Portland-based non-profit that grows sustainable communities by expanding access to healthy food; by empowering all people to participate in a restored local food system; and by modeling and advocating for ecological food production.

We accept Cash , Credit, Debit, EBT, and WIC.



Cover Photo: Amy Temple Photography

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Learn more about us! (207) 761-GROW | www.cultivatingcommunity.org



