

Farming the Market: The Allegan Farmers Market

City of Allegan, Michigan received \$13,167 to revitalize the Allegan Farmers Market. Funds were used to purchase an additional market stall for use by seasonal vendors; benches, wagons, and tables for customers; and advertising in the form of signs, posters, banners, and print media.

[Final Report](#)

Summary of the Issue Being Examined

The purpose of the City of Allegan applying for the USDA-FMPP Grant was to increase funding for advertising for its Farmers' Market. Surveys conducted during the 2006 and 2007 market seasons found that the supply of produce at the Allegan Farmers' Market exceeded the demand from customers. An explanation for this is the simple fact that not enough marketing was being done to attract potential customers to the market. With an annual budget of only \$2500, it was impossible to target a big enough area to attract more customers to the market.

Another issue that needed to be addressed was the environment of the market. Once customers are attracted to the market, we wanted to create a sense of ease in a relaxed shopping environment. By creating a gathering place at the market, and providing tools that would ease a shoppers experience; we felt the Allegan's Farmers' Market could become an important part of revitalizing downtown.

Addressing the Issue

With funding from the USDA-FMPP Grant, we were able to accomplish a large marketing campaign and create a gathering place for the community. The marketing campaign incorporated a marketing strategy that would target a large amount of potential customers over the entire market season. Advertising was purchased from three newspapers within a 25 mile radius of the market. The advertisements were run every other week, to ensure coverage over the entire market season. An advertisement was also placed in the local tourist guide to attract customers that are on vacation in the area.

Another way we attracted potential customers was by placing 11x17 posters at stores, businesses, and community gathering places within a 25 mile radius of the market. Several posters were left, so we will have the ability to continue this part of the marketing strategy in future years.

Other forms of advertising were also purchased to place around the downtown during the week and especially on market days. Large banners were purchased to hang at the market site throughout the week to remind people when and where the market is. Small banners were purchased to attach to light posts throughout downtown and on the river front boardwalk. The small banners serve as a great reminder of the market throughout the downtown area. Several messenger boards were also purchased to place at major intersections on the day of the market. The messenger boards grab potential customer's attention on market days and point them in the direction of the Farmers' Market.

The second issue we addressed with the funds of the FMPP grant was creating a gathering place in the downtown area. Before 2008, customers would come to the market, buy their goods, and leave. There was no sense of community at the Farmers' Market. We tried to change this by purchasing a picnic table and a couple of picnic benches for the market. The thought was, if people stayed at the market longer, it would create a sense of community at the market, which in return would encourage more

people to attend the market. We also purchased a couple of wagons for customers to haul their purchases to their vehicles.

Results, accomplishments, conclusions, and lessons learned

Overall, the funding from the USDA-FMPP Grant has helped the Allegan's Farmers' Market immensely. The marketing strategy was a huge success. Last year, we experienced larger crowds on market days than ever before, despite the state of the economy in Michigan. When talking to customers of the market, we found that our customer base has begun to grow outside of just our local area. People who noticed our ads and posters from other local areas have begun attending our market on a regular basis.

A customer of the Market said, "I am glad you started advertising in the Penassee Globe, I was unaware Allegan had a market, so I was driving to other markets that were further away."

The physical improvements to the market have begun to create a sense of community, while also making it easier for customers to shop. Wagons that were purchased enabled customers to easily move large produce, such as pumpkins, to their vehicles. The picnic bench placed at the edge of the market allows customers to enjoy their lunch at the market.

Throughout the implementation of the grant funds, we experienced only one major problem. The problem we encountered was finding park benches made from recycled material that would fit the city's code for amenities. After much looking, we found benches that would fit, we ordered them, and found they were back ordered. We patiently waited for them to arrive, which they never did. When we tried to contact the company, we found they had gone out of business. While we had not invested any money into the benches, this did slow our progress down. We ended up finding a different manufacturer of the benches and finally received them in March of 2010. While we were unable to see what type of benefits the benches will have on the market, we are sure it will add to the community feel of the market.

Overall, the funding from the grant has greatly enhanced the Allegan's Farmers' Market. The grant has enabled us to reach customers from a larger area, raise awareness of the market, and create an exciting experience at the center of downtown Allegan. While supply still exceeds demand at the market, the grant funding has helped us shorten the gap between the two, and pointed us in the right direction for future seasons of the market.

Benefactors of the Grant

The biggest benefactor of the grant is the City of Allegan as a whole. Many people and organizations have greatly benefited from the funding provided by the grant. The two most obvious groups that have benefited are the vendors and the customers of the market. Vendors have enjoyed larger crowds and more sales on market days.

Shawn Diemer, a vendor of our market, along with other markets in the area, said, "Allegan's Farmers' Market is really attracting customers this season, while others seem to be leveling off or losing customers due to the economy."

Customers of the market have also benefited from the grant funds with carts to help load produce, a table to enjoy their lunch at, and a market full of vendors who want to be part of the growing market. Customers also benefit from the environment and experience the Allegan's Farmers' Market now provides.

However, the benefits of the grant have affected the City of Allegan in more ways than just the customers and vendors of the market. Business owners in downtown Allegan have enjoyed increased foot traffic and sales on days of the market. The market is able to attract consumers to local businesses that wouldn't normally shop in their stores.

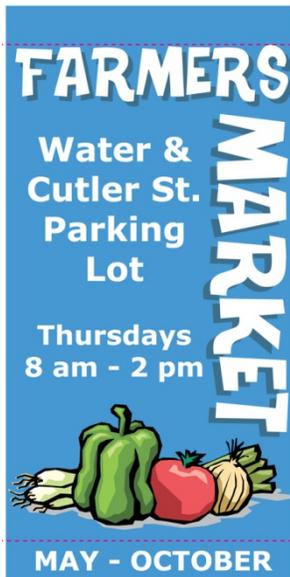
Rick Smith, a local business owner and member of Allegan's Downtown Development Authority, said, "Foot traffic and sales in the downtown area are really increased on market days."

Another group that benefits from the grant funding is non-profit groups in the community. The Allegan's Farmers' Market offers a free spot to one non-profit group each week. With the increase in customers at the market, non-profits are able to interact with a larger amount of people each week.

Additional Information



Example of advertisements ran in local newspaper and posters placed at local businesses.



Banners purchased and placed on lamp posts throughout downtown.



Large banner purchased and placed at the site of the market.

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