

Oscoda County Area Farmers' Market Association Development

Nature's Best Farmers Market (a member owned association) of Fairview, MI received \$5,000 to assist the opening of a new farmers market in Fairview, Michigan. Funds were used to provide signage and promotional materials for the market.

Final Report



Natures Best Farmers Market

1367 Knepp Rd.
Fairview, MI 48621

November 1, 2010

2008 FMPP Grant team
MSD, TM, AMS, USDA
1800 M Street NW, Room S-3012
Washington, DC 20036

Re: Final Report

Dear Sir/Madam:

This final report summarizes the organization of Nature's Best Farmers Market (serving Oscoda County), as required under Reporting Requirements for Awarded Projects.

A communal outlet for locally grown produce had not existed prior to the formation of this market. As is often the case, local governments in rural areas don't recognize the benefit of a farmers market in health, education and economic terms. Since local government had no interest in creating a market, I, as a local gardening enthusiast, put together a plan.

Oscoda County is 75% State and Federal Forest land. The remaining 25% that is privately held houses our county's population of about 9,000. Our soil consists mostly of either sand or clay soil, not very suitable for large scale farming. Those that raise produce must make considerable soil amendments, so there are no large produce farming operations here, but there are a substantial number of home gardeners. Gardeners in this area tend to be traditional, using natural methods that are in high demand at farmers markets. To identify and attract these growers, I advertised in our local weekly newspaper and distributed posters throughout the county. Informational meetings were held in the community room of a local senior housing community. Interested individuals were identified and brought together in a planning process.

Finding a good location was an obstacle. The first year, our market was held in a business parking lot in downtown Fairview. There were difficulties working with the private property owner, so the second and third year we worked with local government to use public property instead. The second year, we located on the county courthouse lawn in Mio. The third year we used a township park pavilion off the main highway in Fairview. There was concern about being off the main highway, but we learned that being situated visibly on a main highway is not as important as overall community support. We found that the target customer is willing to make the drive to support the market and good signage will direct

traffic to the market. The township property we currently use is adjacent to the AuSable Valley Community campus, a senior citizens HUD housing development with independent living structures, assisted living and a nursing home. Many of the seniors have become regular customers of our market, being able to walk from their housing to the pavilion. Many of the seniors have family come to visit them on market day, and accompany them to the market. This enables these seniors to access fresh, local produce without needing to leave their campus and navigate traffic on the main highway.

Advertising is an obstacle for us, as we only have a weekly and a monthly newspaper. We advertise in both, we distribute posters to businesses throughout the county, and distribute handbills whenever possible. Our market participates in the annual Oscoda Soil Conservation District Grow Show in May, where we offer plant starts and pass out handbills to advertise. This event serves as a kickoff to our season. We provide all tourist destinations (motels, campgrounds, canoe liveries, etc.) with a supply of handbills. A couple of our vendors sometimes participate in markets in other communities which are held on different days, and distribute handbills there as well as bring their vendors into our market. We've added 3 out-county vendors to our market this way. We've found ways to advertise without relying solely on newspapers.

In early summer 2010, Michigan legislature passed a "Cottage Industry Exemption" bill which allows certain non-potentially hazardous processed foods prepared in home kitchens to be sold through farmers markets without state licensing/inspection requirements of the facility used to prepare the foods. This single event has significantly broadened the spectrum of foods we can legally bring to the market. Produce vendors are now also bringing baked goods, dried herbs, dry mixes, candy, jams/jellies, etc, and are seeing an increasing demand for these items. One small vendor has become a very large vendor by bringing to market the artisan breads she previously only baked for her family. She sold out every week during market, and even after the market closed for the season, has customers ordering from her at home. Her business has continued well into the fall with no sign of slowing down.

In determining a seasonal vendor fee, I put an annual budget plan together, estimating all expenses (advertising, supplies, printing) and dividing the gross expense amount by the number of anticipated vendors to arrive at a seasonal fee for vendors. As a result, our vendors paid \$30 each to participate for the season, or a \$5 weekly fee. This is much less than most other markets charge vendors; so as a result we've attracted more vendors than anticipated. One great expense was eliminated by being covered by township liability insurance while using township property, as opposed to having to purchase our own policy, as we were required to do first year when we were located on private property.

The overall scope of our market is small, attributed to a small local population (9,000 county-wide) and few growers. Our market can be considered successful at its current size with 10-12 vendors participating each week, and 100-125 customers. We can grow customers from tourism, but only if we experience good weather and good economic conditions in Michigan, meaning much of our future growth is controlled by outside factors. We continue to try to do a better job of bringing in local residents through advertising and word of mouth. Our market creates \$1000 or more in gross direct economic activity each week, or about \$20,000 or more in a season. The peripheral economic impact is difficult to measure; however, a survey we conducted early this season revealed our market caused 40% of our customers to shop other businesses in Fairview more often.

We are registered to accept Michigan's "Project Fresh" coupons issued to low income families, and this winter will be helping the county set up the "Senior Project Fresh" program designed for seniors in Oscoda County.

We are developing many business partners. Northland Area Fed. Credit Union supports our market by way of an annual donation of \$75 toward advertising costs, with the agreement that they will be given recognition in the ads. A local Century 21 realtor allows our market to set up in their building for a Christmas shopping event that is held annually in December in downtown Fairview. A local grocery/party store in the river town of McKinley invites vendors to set up on Saturday mornings in their parking lot to serve their residents and tourists. We welcome the opportunity to partner with local businesses to promote our market and to bring them economic benefit as well. This has helped businesses accept our market without feelings of competition. Our vendors prefer Friday as market day, which frees their weekends for personal use, but also allows vendors to participate in other events on Saturday such as other area farmers markets, and festivals/craft shows. Our market regularly sets up at our local antique tractor show in June, and has plans to be at the Black Bear Festival next year in October. We do these events at a very low or no cost to our market, citing the economic benefits to both the festival and us.

Nature's Best Farmers Market has a wall on facebook, where our customers and vendors can exchange information about events, harvests, and new items coming to market, and I post each Thursday a reminder for our customers to get them into town on Friday. FB is a good marketing tool and it costs nothing to maintain.

Thank you for providing the grant. As previously reported, the grant was used for advertising and to purchase canopies and tables, and a very nice market sign. Without these things, I am certain that our current situation would be much different.

Very Truly Yours,

Denise Agius
Market Manager
Nature's Best Farmers Market
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