

The **YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids** of Grand Rapids, MI received \$76,344 to establish a new urban farmers market in an underserved community; initiate a promotional campaign to recruit and retain farmers; promote the new market's availability; and highlight the accessibility of fresh local products to the community.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Performance Report

Date: December 2, 2011

Recipient Name: YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids

Title of Project: YMCA Farmers Market Startup with New EBT Project

Grant Number: MI-125-2010-G-1162

Location (City/State): Grand Rapids, Michigan

Contact Name/Telephone Number: Emily Martin, 616-813-4026

Project Summary:

The YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids proposed establishing a weekly Farmers Market at its urban facility, which was open Thursdays from 3pm to 7pm from June 15 to October 30, 2011. This market provided an outlet for up to 18 farmers each week to distribute produce directly to 50,000 consumers and 2,500 SNAP recipients over 18 weeks, and increased access to fresh produce for the low income, mostly Latino community that lives in the area. A Farmers Market Manager with strong ties in the local farm community was hired to facilitate management of vendors, bookkeeping requirements, advertising and staffing needs. The market utilized a wireless terminal that allowed for redemption of SNAP benefits as well as debit and credit cards. In addition we were able to accept WIC Project Fresh, Senior Project Fresh and Double Up Food Bucks.

All tasks were completed within 12 months (Nov. 1, 2010 to Oct. 31, 2011). After one year of start up funds used to purchase equipment, expand relationships with the farm community, expand trust with the urban community, and promoting EBT, this market has worked to increase its sustainability and will continue into the next year.

Project Approach:

The market was held in the northwest corner of the David D. Hunting YMCA parking lot, located in downtown Grand Rapids. This location was successful in attracting customers because it is located at the YMCA, where hundreds of people are already coming and going on a regular basis. It is also centrally located between three commuter parking lots for downtown Grand Rapids, and also attracted downtown professionals on their way home from work. Vendors appreciated that this location allowed them to park their vehicles directly behind their stalls, eliminating the need to load in and load out.

In order to reach our target population we decided to purchase a wireless POS terminal which was used to accept SNAP benefits as well as debit and credit card payments. We used a central machine at the market for SNAP customers to purchase wooden tokens to use at the market. Vendors submitted tokens at the end of each market day, and the amount was recorded by the YMCA's accountant. Farmers were issued checks on a biweekly basis for token reimbursements.

In addition to accepting SNAP benefits at the market, we were accepted to participate in the Double Up Food Bucks program. This program is administered through the Fair Food Network,

and uses private funding for an incentive program aimed at SNAP recipients to increase SNAP sales at local farmers markets and increase consumption of fresh produce. When a customer used SNAP benefits at our farmers market, they received a match for what they spend, up to \$20 each market day, to spend on Michigan-grown fresh fruits and vegetables at the market. More information about this program can be found at www.doubleupfoodbucks.org. This was a phenomenal opportunity to provide this program to our low income shoppers, which was an overwhelmingly successful means to help families access fresh produce by increasing their purchasing power towards fresh produce, with the added bonus of increasing economic viability and sales for local farmers. To further ensure access to fresh produce for our low income populations, and increase economic viability and sales for our farmers, we also accepted Project FRESH and Senior Project Fresh coupons.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The main goal of the project was to Expand Local and Rural Economies. The objectives included 1) improving food access to Grand Rapids’ underserved communities to promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms, and 2) fostering job creation and increasing the economic viability of local farmers in West Michigan by establishing a new urban farmers market.

Accomplishments: Recruited 18 vendors to participate in the market, which was the maximum that the space allowed. Unfortunately we had more vendors interested than our space allowed.

428 consumer surveys were completed. Results showed the following:

Spending at Market (of those responding to this question)

- 55% spent \$1-\$10
- 33.5% spent \$11-\$20
- 13.5% spent \$31-\$50

Form of payment

- 14.9% EBT
- 65.6% Cash
- 18.5% Credit/Debit

Results:

*DUFB = Double Up Food Bucks

| | TOTALS TO DATE | AVERAGE |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Total SNAP EBT Distributed | \$ 6,792.00 | \$ 377.33 |
| Total SNAP/EBT Redeemed | \$6,285.00 | \$349.16 |
| Total # of EBT Transactions | 519 | 29 |
| Total DUFB* Distributed | \$ 6,294.00 | \$ 349.67 |
| DUFB Redeemed | \$5,192.00 | \$288.44 |
| Total # of Debit/Credit Transactions | 391 | 22 |
| Total Debit/Credit | \$ 6,195.00 | \$ 344.17 |
| Total Debit/Credit Redeemed | \$6,140.00 | \$341.11 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------|
| WIC Project Fresh Redeemed | \$474.00 | \$26.33 |
| Senior Project Fresh Redeemed | \$482.00 | \$26.77 |
| Estimated Cash Sales | \$9,894.00 | \$549.66 |
| Attendance | 6755 | 375 |

Beneficiaries:

Farmers: Ten farmers weekly (18 farmers total) were provided the opportunity to increase their economic viability by developing consumer demand in this low income community (and received economic incentives to take part during this first season, to offset any worries some had about profit or safety).

Underserved Consumers: Approximately 50,000 consumers living in the area had increased access to fresh produce in this food desert neighborhood over the course of the growing season and an over 500 SNAP purchases were made through our new EBT system.

Lessons Learned:

-The Farmers Survey results showed that farmers would prefer a larger variety in the vendors –
 -Increased marketing efforts make a big difference. During the weeks when the Double Up Food Bucks program had large marketing efforts, our market saw large spikes in customers, particularly EBT customers. We will work on increasing advertising efforts for next season.

Additional Information:

Our market has served and will continue to serve a diverse group of people – from Y members, to the child care families, to residents of the neighborhood surrounding the Y, to Bridge Card holders who have been connected to our market through one of the agencies that has distributed our flyers. Below are a few comments and stories about the impact our farmers market has made on the lives of those we served this year:



- “Many of the kids in our child development center ask their parents if they can go to the market when they pick them up and it has become a routine tradition for many.”

-Heather Walczewski
 Child Development Center Director YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids – David D. Hunting YMCA

- We had a woman who uses a Bridge Card come to the market who had just learned about it on the news and came right over to our market because she was so excited to learn of a market where she could use her Bridge Card, and be matched for what she spent through the Double Up Food Bucks program.
- One of our vendors asked our Farmers Market Manager if she had distributed free tokens to the Y staff to get Y employees to shop at the market and was shocked when our Farmers Market Manager told her that she hadn't – it was just that our Y staff was excited about the market and came out to support it by shopping at it!
- There was a little boy at our market who at first refused a sample of our radish sandwich recipe saying he didn't like radishes. But with a little encouragement he tried it and actually liked it! His mom was overjoyed and went bought some radishes and bread right away to make the sandwiches at home.
- An exciting highlight from the market was the chef cook-off the Y helped plan in partnership with United Church Outreach Ministry (which serves as a food pantry as well as provides other assistance to meet basic needs for individuals). We had three chefs that competed in an iron-chef style competition, held at United Church Outreach Ministry during their open pantry hours. Chefs utilized food from the pantry, and visited the market to purchase produce as if they were using the Double Up Food Bucks program. They made meals to help educate United Church Outreach Ministry's pantry clients on how they could utilize the Double Up Food Bucks program in addition to the food pantry to prepare healthy meals for their family. This event was a huge success.
- Rachel from the Fair Food Network, who administers the Double Up Food Bucks program, visited our market and said she loved it. She also stated that we are the only first year farmers market who is participating in the DUFB program – a real vote of confidence in our market from the Fair Food Network.
- Farmers were delighted with the market with many remarking throughout the season that they sold more at our market than any other market that they were attending.
- Real Time Farms, a website that helps people locate farms and markets in their area, put together the Top 100 Farmers Market photos from all of the photos that have been submitted to their site from across the nation to honor National Farmers Market Week. And – one of the photos from our market made it in! It is below for you to enjoy.



And finally, many customers had many great things to say about our market. This is an awesome quote that pretty much sums up all that customers had to say: “This farmers market is the best thing going on the West side!”