

The **Renville County** of Olivia, MN received \$17,594 to increase the number of consumers purchasing from local farmers markets by implementing a print and television advertising campaign; identifying additional market opportunities; and through evaluation the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Performance Report

December 21, 2012

Renville County

Renville County Farmers Market Consumer Education and Marketing and its Effect on

Consumer Purchases of Local Produce

Grant Agreement Number: 12-25-G-1165

Renville County, Minnesota

Project Summary: The purpose of our project was to improve the marketing efforts and provide consumer education to increase awareness of local products available at farmers markets in Renville County as well as to evaluate/determine market opportunities and the effectiveness of our current marketing efforts. Through surveys of local growers participating in the local farmers markets, we identified a deficiency in perceived visibility and success of the current Farmers' Market advertising programs. It was made clear that a change in the way we promoted our markets and additional education for consumers was necessary. The Mid-Minnesota Development Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for our region also highlighted the need to further develop local food production and sales within the region.

Project Approach: In order to best utilize the FMPP funding, this project was broken down into two phases. The first phase consisted primarily of the research component of our project followed by a second phase applying the findings of the study to the marketing strategy. Since our initial concern was in regards to the effectiveness of our market promotional activities, we did not want to alter or invest in additional marketing/promotional activities until we had gained information from the Renville County Local Foods and Farmers Market Survey (research component) as to how best focus our promotional and educational resources.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Research: Renville County partnered with the University of Minnesota Extension to conduct a survey to profile the food shopping habits and preferred venues of Renville County households. In 2011, 502 households were randomly selected from Renville County property tax

records and received a request to participate in the study. Extension received 282 completed surveys, for a 56% response rate. Survey participants were offered a \$5 farmers market coupon incentive for each household that returned a completed survey. Coupons were numbered and tracked by household, revealing a 41% redemption rate. Of the coupons redeemed at the local farmers' markets, 40% of households redeeming the coupons were new to the farmers market. The research results have since been utilized at state and national conferences. I have attached complete survey results as well as appendix with detailed survey response information as well as a poster that was developed highlighting the results and knowledge gained from the research that was presented at the MOSES conference.

Marketing/Education/Promotion: Information gained from the research component of the project was used to implement a revised marketing strategy for local farmers' markets. Our goal was to improve our marketing initiatives to increase awareness of our local farmers' markets. We purchased additional a-frame signs and banners to improve visibility of the markets. Radio advertising featuring local producers promoting the various markets throughout the county on two local radio stations broadened our reach to consumers and were well received. We promoted our local farmers' markets and the FMPP program each year at the Renville County Fair having a display with educational and promotional information for farmers' markets and distributing reusable farmers' market shopping bags and other promotional and educational items to increase awareness local produce and our local markets. Fall of 2012, we also extended our education and promotion of the local farmers' markets to nearly 1,100 children from every school district in the county. We distributed reusable shopping bags featuring Renville County Farmers' Markets, a small pumpkin or gourd from a local vendor and information regarding my plate (the new nutritional guidelines) to promote the fresh and local produce available from local

farmers' markets as part of fulfilling daily nutritional guidelines. We have also purchased a website that will be developed over the winter that will feature a blog with up to date information about what is available at the local markets.

Beneficiaries: Primary beneficiaries of the project were local growers through increased promotional and educational initiatives we were able to increase awareness of the local markets. Through the incentive involved with the research component of the project we were able to document new first time consumers at the local farmers markets. In addition to the local growers, with the assistance of FMPP funding we were able to purchase radio advertising from local radio stations and additional signage for our markets through local businesses. We also purchased products direct from two local growers as part of our educational and promotional outreach to school children in every school district in the county.

Lessons Learned: Through the research component of this project we learned ways to improve education and promotion of our local markets. Our traditional method of advertising the markets was through newspaper advertising which was viewed as ineffective by both producers and consumers. Improved signage and other advertising methods such as promotional items, incentives and radio advertising were implemented to improve the promotion of our local farmers' markets. Through the incentives we were able to document that new first time consumers visited and made purchases from our local markets. We also increased our awareness of who our current consumer base is and what may incent new consumers. University of Minnesota Extension conducted the research survey to profile the food shopping habits and

venues preferred by households in Renville County. County households responding to the survey procure food from a variety of sources, including their own production (nearly 70 percent), farmers markets (40 percent), and direct from farmers (18 percent). The survey found that those who produce food for their own consumption purchase from local sources at a higher rate than those who do not. When asked about the importance of factors in their food purchase decisions, survey respondents ranked freshness, taste, and price highest, in keeping with past research. Households indicate eating *local foods* is very important to them (45 percent), although respondents would be more inclined to buy local foods if there were (1) availability over a longer season, (2) better quality, (3) lower prices, and (4) greater availability at their local grocery stores. Finally, responses indicated that while traditional newspaper advertising reaches some households, promotional materials which give farmers markets greater physical visibility are most effective in attracting customers. These materials include signage and canopies.

As part of our FMPP project we were hoping to be able to quantify and document increased sales for our local producers as a result of our efforts. Unfortunately, we faced several challenges and we are unable to quantify the results at this time. During the first year of the project MNDOT undertook a large road construction project that displaced one of our markets and both years of the project Renville County was declared a FEMA disaster area as a result of several storm systems that went through our region. The series of strong, damaging storms and the period of drought affected local production. What we do know, is that we did bring in new consumers through the incentive that was offered with the local survey and we are implementing promotional strategies that were identified as being able to increase awareness of the local farmers' markets. This will ideally result in increased sales at local farmers' markets in the future.

Additional Information: Attached to the email are the research survey results and appendix from our project partner the University of Minnesota, an example of a local newspaper advertisement, the MOSES conference poster with research findings and a few local newspaper articles highlighting the FMPP Grant and activities.

Contact Person:

Primary Contact/Project Coordinator: Sara Folsted, Renville County Administrator,

320-523-3754, sara_f@co.renville.mn.us

Research Contact: Ryan Pesch, University of MN Extension, 218-770-4398,

pesch@umn.edu

May 25, 2011

Dear Renville County Resident,

You are invited to be part of the Renville Food and Farmers Market survey, a project supported by Renville County and the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program. Ryan Pesch, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota is conducting the survey.

You were randomly selected to participate from a list of all Renville County households. You will receive \$5 in vouchers good at any Renville Farmers Market in 2011 if you choose to participate and return your survey.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions before filling out the survey.

Confidentiality:

The records from this survey will be kept private. We will publish only summary results in any sort of report we release and no information will be included which will identify individual respondents. All record will be stored securely and only I will have access to those records.

Voluntary Nature of Study:

Participation in this survey is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, USDA, or Renville County. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about this survey, **you are encouraged** to contact Ryan Pesch at 218-998-5787, pesch@umn.edu, or 220 Washington Ave, Fergus Falls, MN 56537.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subject's Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455 or 612-625-1650.

Sincerely,



Ryan Pesch, Extension Educator
220 Washington Avenue
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
pesch@umn.edu
218-998-8787

Renville County

Local Food and Farmers Market Survey



Introduction:

This survey is sponsored by Renville County and USDA Farmer Market Promotion Program and conducted by University of Minnesota Extension.

The purpose of this survey is to learn about the food shopping habits of your household in order to inform local growers and farmers who are looking to meet the needs of local customers.

All responses are confidential in keeping with University of Minnesota policy and only compiled results will be shared with local sponsors. Please contact Ryan Pesch, Extension Educator, at pesch@umn.edu or 218-998-5787 with any questions or concerns.

Instructions:

Please return your completed questionnaire in the addressed and stamped envelope to Ryan Pesch, 220 Washington Ave W, Fergus Falls, MN 56572. All respondents who complete a survey will receive \$5 in vouchers for use at any Renville County farmers market in 2011.

The estimated time to take this survey is 15 minutes.

Please ask the primary food shopper in your household to complete this questionnaire.

1. In the past 12 months, where have you obtained food for your household? *(Circle the numbers for ALL that apply)*

- a. Community garden
- b. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm share
- c. Convenience store/gas station
- d. Direct mail/catalog
- e. Directly from a local farm
- f. Farmer’s Market
- g. Food pantry/shelf
- h. Grocery store
- i. Grown/raised own meat or dairy products
- j. Hunting or fishing
- k. Internet
- l. Meat locker/butcher shop
- m. Senior meal program
- n. Personal, family, or friend’s garden
- o. Roadside stand

2. On average, how much do you usually spend per week to feed your household?

TOTAL SPENT PER WEEK \$ _____

3. What percentage of household food expenses are spent at each location?

| | <i>% of total food expenses</i> |
|---|---------------------------------|
| a. Convenience store/gas station | _____ % |
| b. Farmers Market | _____ % |
| c. Directly from a local farm | _____ % |
| d. Grocery Store | |
| e. Prepared food eaten away from home (fast food, restaurant) | _____ % |
| f. Specialty food store (locker, bakery) | _____ % |
| g. School | _____ % |
| h. Other (specify) _____ | _____ % |

4. What types of foods do you grow/raise for your own consumption? (Circle the numbers for ALL that apply)

1. Do not grow/raise any food
2. Meat
3. Vegetables
4. Fruit
5. Dairy products
6. Other (Please specify) _____

5. What percentage of your total food consumption do you grow/raise yourself? _____%

6. How IMPORTANT are the following factors in your decision about where to purchase your household's food?

Circle a number for each

| | <i>Not at all important</i> | | | <i>Very important</i> | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| a. Offers <i>fresh</i> meats, dairy, or produce | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| b. Sells <i>best tasting</i> meats, dairy, or produce | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| c. Has lowest prices | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| d. Displays are attractive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| e. Offers a wide variety of foods | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| f. Has organic food available | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| g. Offers food grown or raised in an environmentally supportive way | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| h. Offers food grown or raised in my local area | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| i. Offers food grown or raised in Minnesota | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| j. Supports my local economy and jobs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| k. Has competitive prices | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| l. I personally know the food producer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| m. The location is convenient | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| n. My friends or family shop there | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| o. The hours of operation are convenient | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

7. How important is buying *local food* to you? (Circle a number)

| <i>Not at all Important</i> | | | | <i>Very Important</i> | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

8. Would you be more likely to purchase foods from local growers if they ...? (Circle one number for each)

| | Not at all likely | | | | Very likely | |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|---|------------------------|---|
| a. Were offered in ready-to-cook form (chopped, etc) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| b. Came with information on how to prepare them | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| c. Were available in your local grocery store | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| d. Were delivered to your doorstep | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| e. Were available for purchase on the Internet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| f. Were available as a restaurant menu item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| g. Were offered in ready-to-eat form | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| h. Were less expensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| i. Were available over a longer season | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| j. Were better quality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| k. Other _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

9. Please list the top 6 foods that you would most likely consider purchasing if available at local farmers markets or directly from local producers:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Following are some questions about farmers markets located in Renville County.

10. There are 6 farmers markets operating in Renville County.

Were you aware of these farmers markets operating in Renville County? (Please circle)

Yes / No

11. If yes, how did you first learn about any of the farmers market in Renville County? (Please circle)

- a. driving by and saw the market
- b. event / activity calendar
- c. friend/word of mouth
- d. internet
- e. mailing
- f. newspaper ad
- g. newspaper article
- h. radio
- i. roadside sign
- j. don't remember
- k. other _____

12. How much, on average, did you spend per visit to a Renville farmers market? \$_____

13. Which Farmers Market(s) did you visit in the 2010 season? (Circle ALL that apply)

Olivia Buffalo Lake Fairfax Renville Hector Morton

14. How many times did you visit any of these farmers markets in the 2010 season? _____

15. How would you rate the following characteristics of the Renville farmers market(s) you visited? (Circle one number)

| | <i>Very poor</i> | | | <i>Very good</i> | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|---|---|------------------|---|---|
| a. Location | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| b. Bathroom facilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| c. Parking facilities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| d. Cleanliness of market | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| e. Level of courtesy of vendors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| f. Variety of products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| g. Quality of products | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| h. Prices | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i. Vendor displays | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| j. Shopping atmosphere | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| k. Other: _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

16. In your opinion, what can be done to improve farmers markets in Renville County?

Please tell us a bit about yourself so we can better understand the results.

17. Which of the following best describes where you currently live? (Please circle)

1. In town
2. Outside city limits, not on a farm
3. Outside city limits, on a farm

18. Approximately how many years have you lived in Renville County? _____ years

19. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed? (Please circle)

- a. Less than high school diploma
- b. High school diploma or GED
- c. Some college, no degree
- d. Associates degree
- e. Bachelors degree
- f. Graduate or professional degree

20. What is your age? _____

21. How many people live in your household? _____

22. How many people in your household are under the age of 18? _____

