

The Economic Expansion of the Columbia Farmers' Market through Vendor and Manager Education, Focused Marketing, and Diversification

The **Columbia Farmers Market** of Columbia, Missouri received \$57,251 to support expansion of the Columbia Farmers Market through vendor and manager training, market promotion and promotion of EBT usage by local residents.

[Final Report FY09](#)

Final Performance Report

Grant: **12-25-G-0954**

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Project Summary: Through vendor and market manager training and a focused marketing plan the Columbia Farmers' Market (CFM) was able to expand the economic success of mid Missouri farmers while increasing the access to healthy food in an underserved neighborhood.

The Columbia Farmers Market (CFM) had obtained an EBT machine and established a token system but it was not being utilized to its full potential. The Market is located in an underserved neighborhood that would benefit from the access to healthy locally grown fruits and vegetables.

Building and maintaining the diversity of the customer base would need a full time market manager with professional skills to be the community liaison. The market manager was a part-time position. The FMPP grant provided a way for the market manager to gain knowledge and professional development through training and travel.

In anticipation of an increased customer base it was determined that farmers would benefit from continued education in business development.

Project Approach:

EBT marketing was accomplished through radio advertising, signage, and community outreach.

Radio advertising specifically stated that EBT was accepted. In the spring we ran a "Did you know..." campaign that emphasized EBT could be used to purchase food bearing plants such as edible herbs, berry bushes, tomato plants and other vegetable plants. This was a huge successful approach to help folks understand the full benefit of EBT and the opportunity to produce their own food. The rest of the growing season we continued to advertise that EBT was accepted and promoted seasonal produce as many consumers are not familiar with seasonal varieties.

Our market is open thirty-five Saturdays, mid March to mid November, with the beginning and end of the season not having as much variety or as many vendors. We determined it would be most successful to run the majority of the radio ads from May to October when there is the more produce. The radio station contracts had matching ads for no additional charges which ran during those months.

Another way to expand the advertising dollar as much as possible the second year we ran radio ads every other week during the busiest months. Thus we were able to start radio ads earlier in the season and continuing further into the fall.

The best signage we purchased were corrugated plastic "step in" signs similar to garage sale signs. The size is two feet by three feet, larger than a garage sale sign. The wording listed the market was now open, food stamps are accepted and an arrow pointing in the direction of the market location. These signs were placed a half of mile from the market; at busy intersections where the market was not visible. Because we operate on an empty parking lot with no structure it is important to remind folks we are there and open. Considered renegade marketing, temporary signage during market hours really brings in customers. We often hear, "I would have forgotten market was open, but I saw the sign." The signage also brought EBT customers who said they didn't know about EBT acceptance until they saw the sign.

For community outreach the most successful event, Immigrant Day, was established by the local non-profit Sustainable Farms & Communities (SF&C). The focus was to promote the Market to new immigrants and refugees who were shy about attending because of their limited English speaking. Translators for Spanish, Arabic, French, Russian, German, Swahili, and a couple more gave tours of the market. Each translator held a sign showing the language that he/she spoke. SF&C purchased cash value tokens from CFM so that every participants received ten dollars for shopping. They also received a SF&C tote bag. Both years of the grant SF&C organized the event and dispensed tokens and tote bags. We continue to hold the event the same week as World Refugee Day, June 20th.

As a project partner, Sustainable Farms & Communities established a matching funds program, Access to Healthy Foods (AHF) to benefit low income Columbia families who participate in both WIC and SNAP programs. These families are surveyed by the Columbia Health Department to determine willingness to participate. SF&C collects donations from local businesses and individuals to fund the match which is \$25 a week for twenty four weeks a year. In 2011 SF&C expected to match \$15,000.00. In 2012 SF&C expects to match \$30,000.00.

To meet the growing demands of operating a larger diverse customer base with more vendors, and implement the grant, funding was awarded for the part-time market manager. The increased financial obligation was made sustainable beyond the terms of this FMPP grant as the market vendors appreciated the increased revenue and the additional market locations and raised their membership fees according.

For professional development as market manager, I attended the 2010 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association convention in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I was able to network with

several producers and market managers; gather information on marketing ideas; tour several different operations. The exchange of ideas and expansion of my thought process in operating a farmers market was invaluable.

I also attended the Project for Public Space workshop, Create a Successful Market Place. I highly recommend this workshop as it gave me a better understanding of how a farmers market fits within a community; how to gain community support; what to look for in a new location. From the information I gained attending these educational conferences I was able to establish two satellite farmers' markets, one in south Columbia and the other in north Columbia. To determine each location took six months of research.

Originally Missouri University Extension was scheduled to hold two business development classes known as Grow Your Farm. Each session is approximately sixteen weeks, including farm tours and business plan work sessions. Unfortunately because of staff issues they only held one session in 2010. The farmers who attended developed and presented specific business plans for their operations.

We were able to amend our grant to fund training that farmers attended to learn farming techniques and marketing approaches. Each farmer submitted Farmer Training questionnaire that asked why were you interested in this training; how do you plan on using the training to affect your production/marketing; lists short, mid and long term goals. The farmer also submitted a summary explaining the changes made as a result of the training.

Because farming is so closely tied to weather CFM organized a training session with Dr. Anthony Lupo, Department Chair and Professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Missouri Columbia. Topics covered included but not limited to: how meteorologists use information to determine their weather report broadcasts; El Ninos, La Ninas.

Goals, Outcomes Achieved:

- * EBT usage increased from \$400 a month to \$400 in four hours at Saturday market.
- * EBT usage increased 77% from June, 2008 when CFM first accepted EBT to the end of 2011.
- * Market manager gave 16 presentations at the Columbia Health Dept. to WIC/SNAP participants about shopping at CFM, seasonal produce and home food preservation techniques.
- * Established matching EBT program, Access to Healthy Food that has increased participants from 25 families the first year to an anticipated 50 families in 2012. The \$25 match is higher than the national average.
- * Refugee Day has been established as an annual event that assists 100 non English speaking families in shopping at CFM.

- * 12 corrugated plastic step in signs were purchased and continue to be used in addition to wooden sandwich board signs to promote market locations and EBT acceptance.
- *CFM participated as a community partner in the Unite 4 Healthy Neighborhoods kick-off event which was organized by local non-profit PedNet and the City/County Health and Human Services as an initiative to promote better health through daily activity, better eating habits, and safer neighborhoods.
- *Shopper's guide created to explain the differences in shopping at a farmers market compared to a grocery store.
- * Jobs created: Market manager was promoted to a newly created position Senior Market Director in February 2011.
- * CFM hired a market manager in addition to the Senior Market Director. Both positions funded through vendor fees which increased the CFM budget by 20%.
- *Senior Market Director was elected to the Farmers Market Coalition board of directors in 2011.
- * Two satellite locations have been established: June, 2010 South Columbia, August, 2011 North Columbia. Thus increasing sales opportunities for mid Missouri farmers while increasing fresh produce availability for EBT recipients in these other locations.
- * Market hours have increased from a weekly 8 hours to 12 hours.
- * CFM's overall customer base has grown 6.5% in relation to these 2 additional market locations.
- * Columbia Farmers Market recognized nationally as a 'triple bottom line market' serving the community, consumers, and farmers.
- *Forty farms were represented at the farmer training session on weather forecasting.
- * Farmer training assisted two CFM farmers to open another farmers market in their local community forty miles northwest of Columbia. This new market operates on Tuesday, a day that CFM is not open. Two more CFM farmers also participate in this Tuesday market.
- * Farmer training assisted CFM's canned good vendor to expand sales by supplying locally raised and processed jams and jellies to the high school to re-sell as a fundraiser. It was so successful, the vendor is seeking additional schools to participate.
- * Farmer training assisted two farmers to expand their sales to restaurants and a casino. The casino has since remodeled and renamed their restaurant "The Farmers' Pick," as at least three to five CFM vendors are their suppliers. The CFM egg vendor, two high school brothers, sold over 100,000 eggs to the casino in 2011.
- * Missouri University Extension contracted with five CFM vendors to give presentations in their webinar series that covers organic production, direct marketing, community supported agriculture, expanding sales to institutions.

Beneficiaries:

Columbia Farmers Market vendors benefitted from farmer training that increased their sales, professionally enhanced their operations, and gained knowledge that they now share through webinars and as speakers to FFA, 4-H, and other local community organizations. Through their

business success the CFM farmers were able to increase their membership and stall fees so that the budget increased 20% in order to sustain two paid staffers ~ senior market director and a market manager. As a membership organization governed by a board of elected volunteers, the farmers gained a more professional approach to the overall operation of the farmers market. They voted and approved the following mission statement: *The mission of the Columbia Farmers Market is to provide both the local farmer and consumer a reliable, regulated marketplace for the direct exchange of high quality and safe food. By facilitating such commerce the market strives to meet the needs of the local consumer while encouraging sustainable agriculture in mid-Missouri.*

By working on the FMPP project together CFM and SF&C have gained a more productive relationship that gives SF&C the worthwhile mission of raising funds for the EBT match for the program Access to Healthy Foods (AHF). The program has further enhanced the relationship between CFM and the City Health Department. The opportunities to explore more diversity within the community has made CFM a truly valuable asset and contributor within the mid Missouri community.

EBT recipients gained knowledge that CFM accepts SNAP; more aware of where their food comes from; built a continue relationship with the farmers and the market overall. Outreach to not only EBT recipients but all consumers continues through programs at the City Health Department, local churches, and community events such as the annual Refugee Day.

As the first CFM senior market director I am proud of the accomplishments achieved through the FMPP grant. I value the professionalism gained through my training and travels. In as much experience I have gained, I will continue to give back to the farmers market industry community. I am considered the face of our market and maintain the important role of promoting locally grown farm products while helping new businesses establish themselves through the farmers market. I have a better understanding of how a farmers market is an incubator for entrepreneurs and I value the wide range of experience I gain as I assist each vendor to achieve success in his/her endeavors.

Lesson Learned: Growing a solid customer base is a time consuming on-going task that takes dedicated staffers. Farmers are willing to pay adequate fees once they see the benefits of paid staff. Most farmers come to understand community outreach helps to build a successful market.

Organizing a successful annual event that will grow and develop into a community resource needs paid staff as it is probably more responsibility than one volunteer is willing to do. The second annual Refugee Day did not go well as the SF&C volunteer dropped the ball without warning so that now CFM is the main organizer of the event with additional assistance coming from SF&C.

The farmers market industry is rapidly evolving as more young professionals see a way to gain full-time agriculture employment through the labor intensive work growing for local community markets, a job that cannot be outsourced to another country. Farmers markets are an important part of local economic sustainability.

Thank you for shopping at the Columbia Farmers' Market

The government restricts how SNAP/EBT can be handled at farmers' markets.

Our market has a token system which is easy to use.

Your tokens can be spent on any food item except hot food and food you eat at the market. It can also be spent on edible plants like herbs or plants to produce food you can eat, such as tomato plants.

The government does not allow the vendors to give change for SNAP/EBT tokens.

**The Market accepts tokens
at all of our locations.**

If you have any questions please come to the information tent or call the market
573-823-6889

www.columbiafarmersmarket.org

www.dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp/

Missouri EBT



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Missouri EBT



COLUMBIA FARMERS MARKET



Eat Fresh, Eat Local

Now in 2 Locations:

1701 West Ash Street

ARC Parking Lot at the corner of
Clinkscales Rd. and West Ash St.
3 blocks east of Stadium Blvd.

Open Saturdays 8am to Noon
May 5, 2011 to October 13, 2011
Weds. 4pm to 6pm May to October
Mon. 4pm to 6pm June to August

FORUM
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

3900 Forum Blvd.

Forum Christian Church Parking Lot
Corner of Forum & Nifong Blvds.

Thursday evenings 4pm - 6pm
May 5, 2011 to October 13, 2011

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español

Spanish

Español

Español

SETSWANA

BAMBARA

Bambara
French

French
Français

Beethoven
ANNA HALL ISLAND

Columbia Farmers Market

Open Today

WE ACCEPT FOOD STAMPS



Columbia Farmers Market Community Outreach

Each year the Columbia Farmers Market participates in community outreach in many ways such as having a display at other events and by allowing other organizations to set up at the Market on Saturday.

2010 Heart of Missouri Master Gardeners setup at the Market monthly from May to September.

January: Caroline Todd presented at the Vegetable Growers Conference in St. Joseph, Missouri.

February: As part of the USDA-FMPP grant Caroline Todd attended the annual convention in Lancaster, Pennsylvania for NAFDMA, North America Farm Direct Marketing Association.

March: Missouri River Network Community displayed rain barrels for sale. Caroline Todd presented at the MU Extension Grow Your Farm class in Warrensburg, gratis.

April: CFM partnered with PedNet, Columbia/Boone County Public Health & Human Services, the ARC, Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, Columbia Housing Authority, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for the Unite 4 Healthy Neighborhoods, a community gathering to inspire healthy, positive, grassroots change for the community by the community. Dorothy Canote, Ronda Thiessen and Caroline Todd attended the Boonville Farmers Market meeting to answer questions on how a market operates.

May: CFM set up at Earth Day in Peace Park and handed out over 200 shoppers guides informing the public that the Market has opened for the season.

Rockbridge Culinary School Omelets Breakfast fundraiser to send two students to National Competition.

After six months of research and preparation the Columbia Farmers Market was able to gain unanimous support from the Columbia City Council and City Manager to operate three satellite markets. Three days later Columbia Farmers Market SOUTH was opened, had a successful first year with an average of twelve vendors and approximately 300 customers per week. Tentatively this SOUTH market will open again April 7, 2011.

June: First Annual Farm 2 Table, a state wide event implemented by the University Club. CFM received \$2,500 for Caroline Todd assisting with the planning and set up of the Market Stroll area. The donation to the Market is a 43% return on time spent to participate.

July: Cornfest, fundraiser for Sustainable Farms & Communities; the longest continuing annual event held. Corn roasted by Dan Kuebler.

August: Vendor 30th Anniversary Celebration.
Mid Missouri Daylily Society held their annual sale.

September: Mid Missouri Iris Society held their annual sale two different weekends this year. Columbia Farmers Market was awarded a three year specialty crop block grant from MO Dept of Agriculture for a total of \$26,451.00 in funding to operate an indoor winter farmers market. This grant was written by Caroline Todd and Debi Kelly of the Missouri Alternative Center.

October: 3rd Annual Pumpkin Smash with Catapult from Mizzou School of Engineering; pumpkins donated from Bradford Farm and hauled by Jim Quinn MU Extension. The Market hosted the pilot program, Access Healthy Food, funded by PedNet and organized by Casey Corbin, Sustainable Farms & Communities.

November: .
As primary USDA FMPP grant contact Caroline Todd attended the mandatory meeting in Washington DC where she was able to learn about other grant projects and more grant opportunities.