

## **Healthy Foods, Healthy Families - NEW EBT Project**

**Urban Districts Alliance** of Springfield, Missouri received \$20,361 to implement a new EBT system that increased low-income consumers' access to two farmers markets in the Springfield and southwest Missouri areas and assisted farmers/vendors in learning to use this equipment.

[Final Report FY09](#)

**December 30, 2010**

**Urban Districts Alliance**

**Center City Farmers Market Education and Promotion**

**Grant Number: 12-25-G-0955**

**Springfield, MO**

## Project Summary

Springfield's metropolitan service area encompasses 400,000 residents and is the region's hub for education, health care, and entertainment. The Urban Districts Alliance worked with stakeholders to:

- Improve access to relevant production, marketing and financial information for current and prospective farmers;
- Educate consumers and enhance market access to low income households with new EBT equipment;
- Develop innovative approaches to market operations and management, and promote the Commercial Street and Park Central Square Farmers Markets.

Through the year-long FMPP grant, several challenges surfaced, including:

- **Fragmentation** – Out of the six farmers markets inside the city limits of Springfield, five average less than 20 vendors (with the exception being the Greater Springfield Farmers Market at the Battlefield Mall). Thus, customers are underwhelmed upon arrival by the limited number of vendors and products.
- **Insufficient Supply** – There is a lack of both the number of vendors and the amount of product they produce in comparison to the customer demand. This was true both at the C-Street Market where attractive produce sold out quickly and at the Downtown Friday Night Market when the restaurant program would take much of the produce from one or two vendors.
- **Consumer Education Needed** – The Center City markets were promoted heavily through newspaper ads, websites, e-blasts, and Facebook. However, in this first year of the wireless card reader, EBT redemption for the year was only \$2,150 and debit sales were just \$1,915. A post-market survey indicated that 48% of EBT recipients preferred direct mail as the best way to communicate with them. Email was the second highest with 26%.
- **No Sense of Character** – The majority of area farmers markets are located on asphalt parking lots which provide no protection from the sun, wind, and rain and there are no restroom facilities, performance area, or prep kitchen. The only market with a pavilion is the C-Street Market and it is limited in the number of vendors it can serve. Compared to urban markets in St. Louis, Kansas City, and Little Rock, the markets in Springfield significantly lack character.

There is a considerable level of interest in farmers markets and local foods. Attendance at the markets at the beginning of the season was very strong before the exceptionally hot temperatures of July and August took a toll on produce vendors. Bistro Market, a new downtown grocery store which opened in August, began featuring local vendors in its store seven days-a-week. Trolley's, a downtown restaurant, conducted a pilot project featuring the meats and produce from three of the Friday Night Farmers Market vendors every Friday night. It generated a total of \$1,742 in sales over its 13 weeks. The plan is to expand that program to other downtown restaurants in 2011 to provide a nice base of sales to recruit new vendors by supplementing walk-up customers.

The information above demonstrates there was significant need for the FMPP grant for Springfield. With the exception of the Center City markets, all the markets are managed by volunteers. The grant promoted state and federal programs, enhanced communication between markets, and encouraged market managers to think beyond their respective markets to look at how to best serve the entire city.

## **Project Approach**

- **Improve access to relevant production, marketing and financial information for current and prospective farmers**

The UDA hosted educational sessions for area farmers market vendors and managers on the following topics –

**“Marketing and Social Media for Farmers Markets”** – Eileen Nichols (market manager for the Webb City Farmers Market and Secretary for the Missouri Farmers Market Association) and Donnie Rodgers (market manager for the C-Street Market and marketing coordinator for UDA) shared strategies and lessons learned on website development, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

**“Federal and State Resources for Farmers Markets”** – Tony Anderson of the Missouri Department of Agriculture and Sarah Becker from the Lincoln University Extension Office provided information on the “Grow Your Farm” program, state producer programs, and other grant resources. From the FMPP grant, UDA is providing scholarships to two area producers (Mark Frank of Seymour and Clint McAllister of Springfield) to attend the “Grow Your Farm” program. It pays half of the \$250 entry fee at registration and then pays another \$75 when they complete the course and present their business plan.

**“Financial 101 for Farmers Markets”** – Gordon Carriker of the University of Missouri Extension Office led a session on the importance of developing a business plan and other financial planning resources available to farmers market vendors.

Each session was free of charge for participants and averaged 15 attendees from six different markets. They allowed vendors to put a face with a name and will increase the likelihood of their reaching out to these state and regional resources in the future. It also brought market managers and vendors together to stimulate future conversations (such as between the Greater Springfield Market and the Center City Markets).

The C-Street Market also brought in the Springfield-Greene County Health Inspector to discuss proper food handling techniques for farmers markets. The Friday Night Farmers Market manager attended the Springfield-Greene County meeting and distributed information to all the vendors.

As a member of the Missouri Farmers Market Association and a recipient of a wireless EBT/Debit machine grant from the Missouri Department of Agriculture, UDA is on their respective email lists and distributes that information to vendors as applicable.

- **Educate consumers and enhance market access to low income households with new EBT equipment**

The UDA did many things to promote the Center City Markets to the general community, including:

- Sent out news releases to announce the Markets and recruit new vendors
- Hosted a news conference to announce Regions Bank sponsorship of the Friday Night Farmers Market on April 28, 2010.

- Developed a day's worth of activities to kick off the C-Street Market season – ECommunity Fest with live music, informational sessions on green practices, and special vendors on Saturday, May 8, 2010
- Created a Facebook page for the Friday Night Market. It ended the season with 570 friends
- Created a Facebook page for the C-Street Market. It ended the season with 817 friends
- Sent out weekly e-blasts to 2,500 subscribers from the "It's All Downtown" website
- Sent emails out to major employers (City of Springfield, Greene County, Drury University, etc.) with discounts for their employees to shop at the Center City Markets
- Promoted the Markets on the [www.itsalldowntown.com](http://www.itsalldowntown.com) website (which averaged over 45,000 pages viewed per month during the market season)
- Advertised weekly in the Springfield News-Leader Weekend section and expanded the coverage with a new advertising circular called "Experience Downtown" beginning in mid-August. This insert has increased traffic to the [www.itsalldowntown.com](http://www.itsalldowntown.com) website 27%. Costs were matched by the Downtown and C-Street CIDs
- Purchased 10 six-column ads in the Community Free Press. Costs were matched by the CID
- Featured farmers markets in the Springfield Business Journal "Center City Scenes" column for May 2010 and in SBJ's Center City Progress Report in June 2010.
- Featured local live music for 16 of the 22 weeks of the Friday Night Farmers Market
- Hung six streetscape banners downtown and six on C-Street to promote the Markets
- Created and distributed table tents to downtown restaurants
- The Friday Night Farmers Market has the added benefit of cross-promotions with downtown's very popular "First Friday Artwalk." Typically, 3,000 to 5,000 people attend each month, which provides a guaranteed influx of customers to the Market

The UDA also worked to improve market access to low income households, including:

- The locations of the Friday Night and C-Street Markets are very close to the areas of Springfield with the greatest concentration of low income households. Public transportation is available at both, especially the Friday Night Market which is two blocks from the main bus station
  - Attended the Woodland Heights, Grant Beach, Midtown, and West Central neighborhood meetings (the four low income neighborhoods adjacent to the Center City Markets) to promote the Markets and acceptance of EBT
  - Included information on the Friday Night Farmers Market in two West Central newsletters
  - Worked with Community Partnership to get EBT information out to families in Center City
  - Hung EBT posters at the Missouri Division of Family Services
  - Worked with staff at The Kitchen (a major social service agency which helps homeless women and children on C-Street) to promote the availability of EBT at the C-Street Market
- **Develop innovative approaches to market operations and management**
    - The Friday Night and C-Street Markets were the first Springfield markets to offer an EBT and debit card reader. This reader was shared between the two markets to maximize efficiency. The FMPP grant did not pay for this reader as it was part of a Missouri Department of Agriculture grant where UDA received it free. By going through the MDA, the processing fees were very reasonable and no charges for months the Markets are not in operation.
    - Trolley's (a downtown restaurant) initiated a pilot project for a "Farmers Market Special" every Friday night, which featured the meats and produce from three of the Friday Night Farmers Market vendors. It generated a total of \$1,742 in sales over its 13 weeks. The plan

- is to expand that program to several of the other 40 downtown restaurants in 2011 to provide a nice base of sales to recruit new vendors by supplementing walk-up customers.
- UDA (a non-profit community development corporation) was able to include the Center City Markets in its liability coverage, which helped minimize out-of-pocket costs for the Markets.
  - UDA leveraged the cost of advertising the Center City Markets with the Community Improvement Districts in Downtown and C-Street. The CIDs were happy to promote the community events occurring within their districts and the Markets saved advertising dollars.
  - UDA worked with architecture students at Drury University to examine options for the downtown market (possibly in conjunction with the Bistro Market). Drury students designed and constructed the C-Street Market pavilion. Drury is currently looking to significantly expand its presence on C-Street which will increase traffic to the Market.
  - Price Cutter's Bistro Market downtown grocery store opened in August 2010 and proved to be an innovative addition for local foods. Management traveled to 30 cities across the country to study urban stores and national franchises. Because Price Cutter is a locally-owned company, they are also committed to featuring local products. Three of the Friday Night Market vendors (Fassnight Creek Farms, Rocking Z Ranch, and Old Mill Bagel) provide them with product 7-days-a-week. This increases the community's exposure to local foods and opens opportunities for other vendors. UDA was a resource to Price Cutter management and its consultants for the design of the store and helped promote its opening.

### **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

The following goals and outcomes were achieved as a result of the FMPP grant:

- Recruited five new farmers to the Center City Markets (Xiong's Produce, Hang's Produce, Panhai's Produce, Lor's Produce, and Ozark Family Farms)
- Increased the number of vendors by 45% (Friday from 8 to 11 and C-Street from 12 to 18)
- Conducted three business educational sessions for farmers throughout the region
- Provided two "Grow Your Farmer" scholarships for area farmers
- Worked with the Health Department to educate vendors on food safety and handling
- Conducted a survey of EBT customers in November and December 2010. 116 surveys were completed (the results are summarized in the appendices)
- Purchased a new EBT unit for the C-Street and Friday Night Markets through a grant from the Missouri Department of Agriculture
- Conducted the first ECO-mmunity Fest to promote local foods and the C-Street Market. The C-Street Market manager also updated the site plan for 2010 to enhance sales
- Worked with Public Works, local architects, and the Drury School of Architecture on future options for the Friday Night Market either on Park Central East or with the Bistro Market
- Leveraged savings on farmers market liability insurance with UDA community events
- Distributed surveys to Center City residents and employees. 227 surveys were completed (the results are summarized in the appendices)
- Promoted the C-Street and Friday Night Farmers Markets
  - Cross-promoted with events (Artsfest, C-Street Jam, and Sounds on the Square)
  - Printed posters and highlighted the Markets in the Springfield Business Journal Center City Progress Report (which was included in its 7,000 subscriptions)
  - Installed 12 streetscape banners (6 Downtown and 6 on C-Street)
  - Purchased weekly advertisements (20 weeks) in the News-Leader Weekend section
  - Developed website materials for [www.itsalldowntown.com](http://www.itsalldowntown.com) and promoted the markets on the weekly Center City e-blasts (2,500 subscribers)

### **Beneficiaries**

The Farmers Market Promotion Program grant produced many beneficiaries. Current farmers attended free educational programs, experienced increased customer traffic from new promotions, had more vendors at their respective markets, and their customers had the new option of using EBT and debit for payment. Prospective farmers were actively recruited, could participate in free educational sessions, and had the opportunity to be a part of established markets. Low-income households had two urban farmers markets in close proximity and could use EBT for their purchases for the first time. The University of Missouri Extension Center and Missouri Department of Agriculture were able to promote their educational resources and grant programs. The Springfield-Greene County Health Department was able to more effectively educate vendors on food safety and handling. Finally, farmers market customers were a major beneficiary as they had many more vendors to choose from, more payment options with EBT and debit, and special promotions such as the Friday Night Farmers Market special at Trolley's, live music, and the ECO-mmunity Fest.

The FMPP grant helped elevate the vision for Springfield markets and will have long-lasting implications.

### **Lessons Learned**

There were several lessons learned from the FMPP grant, including:

1. **EBT Takes Time** – Building a customer base for EBT is not something that happens right out of the gate. In visiting with other FMPP markets, the first year is typically slow with nice growth the second year and exponential growth the third year. That information is encouraging for the Center City Markets to keep moving forward and strengthen ties with Missouri Family Services and social service agencies. Based on the survey of EBT customers, it was clear that direct mail is the preferred method of getting information on markets to them and UDA will work to utilize that approach for 2011. Post-season suggestions from vendors also included sidewalk signage to remind Center City shoppers of the Markets.
2. **Less is More** – Rather than having six farmers markets in a community of the size of Springfield, it should probably have roughly half that amount. It would allow the resulting markets to be of adequate scale to have a good variety of quality vendors. UDA will be working with area farmers markets to see what consolidations might be possible.
3. **Demand Greater Than Supply** – There is significant interest in Springfield for local foods. Even with consolidated farmers markets, more vendors need to be recruited – especially those with produce, fruits, eggs, and poultry. Several downtown restaurants and the Bistro Market are also interested in featuring local foods. In addition to the recruitment new vendors, existing producers need to increase their volume and lengthen their growing seasons. Several downtown vendors are already planning to work with Trolley's restaurant before the spring planting season to better align their crops and menu.
4. **Sense of Place** – Springfield farmers markets lack character in comparison to other major cities in the Midwest. Part of market consolidation will be looking at ways to enhance the sense of place through combining market amenities (pavilions, performance areas, permanent restrooms, etc.) with the neighboring architecture. This is an area where Center City Markets can compete very effectively and is consistent with the national interest in sidewalk cafes.

**Additional Information**

**Several project partners collaborated on this FMPP grant:**

Downtown Springfield Community Improvement District.....Market Advertising

Downtown Springfield Association.....Sounds on the Square Concert Series & Weekly E-Blasts

C-Street Community Improvement District.....C-Street Market Grand Opening Advertising

Springfield-Greene County Health Department.....Food Safety and Handling Education

City of Springfield.....Closing Park Central East Weekly for Friday Night Market

Drury University School of Architecture.....C-Street Pavilion Construction & Downtown Design Concepts

Missouri Department of Agriculture.....EBT Unit & Educational Session (State & Federal Resources)

Lincoln University Extension.....Educational Session (Grow Your Farm)

University of Missouri Extension.....Educational Session (Finance 101 for Farmers Markets)

The Kitchen.....Promote EBT for C-Street Market and EBT Survey Site

Missouri Division of Family Services.....Promote EBT for Center City Markets and EBT Survey Site

**The attached materials are representative of the accomplishments of the grant:**

- Center City Farmers Market Survey Results (June 2010)
- EBT Farmers Market Survey Results (November-December 2010)
- Social Media Educational Presentation (November 2010)
- Poster for Center City Markets
- Downtown Springfield Association Weekly E-Blast
- Springfield News-Leader Experience Downtown Weekly Ads
- Springfield Business Journal Center City Scenes Column – May 2010