Cleveland Farmers Market: Fostering Community through Access, Education, Infrastructure and Promotion - New EBT

Delta State University of Cleveland**,** Mississippi received $31,075 to install EBT, enhance and expand the Cleveland Farmers Market, made infrastructure improvements and implemented a promotional campaign that together increased consumer access to locally grown produce.

Final Report FY09

Final Progress Report

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Project Summary

In 2004, a group of Cleveland, MS residents interested in food quality and community development gathered to brainstorm ideas to make fresh, locally grown produce more readily available in their area. The Cleveland Farmers Market (CFM), based in the rural region of Mississippi known as the Delta, has worked to expand the role locally grown foods play in the growth and sustainment of the area. By connecting local farmers to local consumers, local consumers to local produce, educating all constituents on the importance of food in a viable local economy, then increasing the efficiency of that local exchange, the CFM aids in community development efforts that seek to better the health and nutrition of local residents; enhance and expand local economic opportunities; encourage diversity; and foster microenterprise development, specifically among youth.

The CFM's project focused on further development of the market with the end goals of increasing both the vendor and customer base, improving sales, enhancing access to local foods, and stimulating greater consumption of locally produced foods.

This project was, and is still, being implemented by a volunteer group of committed individuals. They have taken on the responsibility for planning and implementing the different components of the project discussed below. The project is coordinated through the Delta State University Center for Community and Economic Development. This report was prepared with collective input from the overall project team.

Project Approach

To address the needs mentioned above, the CFM project had the following goals: increase access to the market; enhance consumer education around locally grown produce; and increase the efficiency of the market. To accomplish these goals the project had four focus areas: promotion, education, infrastructure, and access.

Promotion efforts created a strong market campaign by building on existing and creating new partnerships, improving and enhancing promotional products, and increasing overall awareness of the CFM and the benefits of participating for growers and consumers alike. The Education efforts focused on instruction and outreach. Partnering with the non-profit group Friends of the Environment as well as the Cleveland Career Development and Technical Center and Delta State's Division of Family and Consumer Sciences allowed for the following programs to be piloted through this project: Sustainable Table; Greenhouse/Home Gardening (GHG); and Neighborhood Chef. The area of Infrastructure focused on evaluating all market tents, tables, and signs, and spearheaded the replacement of well worn materials. Lastly, the area of Access focused on increasing the use of WIC Farmers' Market Vouchers and use of an EBT machine for food stamp eligible consumers to participate in the market.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved

Promotion

Goal: Increase awareness of the market through general promotion of the market as well as encourage patronage, raise awareness of the benefits of a local market, and inform consumers of the changing market offerings and the option to purchase goods with WIC-FMNP and EBT.

- Promotional efforts
    - In 2010 a brochure, posters, free newspaper adds, table and road signs, and a table banner were developed and utilized.
        - an example of a news paper article done on the CFM is found in the section titled *Additional Information* at the end of this report.
    - Five different "fresh" posters were used to advertise for the CFM in both the 2010 and 2011 seasons (examples are in the section titled: Additional Information).
    - Two different "Start a Fresh Routine" posters were used to advertise the CFM 2011 season (examples are in the section titled: Additional Information).
    - The CFM blog (clevelandfarmersmarket.blogspot.com) was updated and utilized over the two seasons to advertise the market and the educational efforts of the Sustainable Table and Greenhouse/Home Gardening (GHG).
    - Efforts were made to increase participation among growers. Over 40 "Growers Wanted" posters were distributed throughout Cleveland and the surrounding area.
    - "Farmer's Market Cash" gift cards were used to increase participation among consumers at the market. Gift cards were available in amounts of $2, $5, and $10.

- Tote bags were created and available for sale, 12 were sold in the 2011 market year.

- "You are what you eat" T-shirts were designed for selling in the CFM 2011 season. Examples of the t-shirts can be found in the section titled *Additional Information* at the end of this report.

- Mothlite Media, a local graphic design company of Cleveland, Mississippi was used for the CFM promotion efforts

- Promotional efforts resulted in the following:

  - For the early and extended market season, there were an average of 4-5 producers participating each Saturday and an average of 5 producers for the midweek market.
    - A total of 20 different producers participated in market activities during the 2011 season.

  - The weather did not seem to detract growers or consumers from participating in the 2011 market season.
    - The Saturday markets brought a larger number of growers and consumers when the market was correlated with a local event. For example:
      - A season high of 9 growers and 260 consumers turned out for the market on July 9, 2011 when the Humane Society had their bake sale and the music of Ben Shaman was featured.
      - A total of 5 growers and 115 consumers turned out for the market on June 18, 2011 when the music of Chris Hartfield was featured.
      - A total of 5 growers and 222 customers turned out for the market on July 2, 2011 when the music of Aaron Taylor was featured.
    - The midweek Wednesday market was not associated with any events such as music performances, but still produced a comparable showing of growers and consumers. For example:
      - Opening day for the midweek market, June 15, 2011 had a total of 5 growers and 151 consumers
      - The second best turnout for the midweek market was June 22, 2011 with a total of 6 growers and 135 consumers.

- Successes

  - The promotional efforts of the CFM resulted in the attraction of more growers (as indicated above).
  - Promotional efforts also resulted in new and attractive methods of advertising which helped bring in more growers and consumers.

- Challenges
    - The promotion committee was to work with the Sustainable Table education program (discussed below) to publish, promote and sell a CFM cookbook. However, this did not happen as the cookbook was delayed beyond the grant period. Plans are underway to complete the cookbook in 2012.
    - "You are what you eat" t-shirts took longer than expected to be produced so they missed being sold in the 2011 season, but they are printed and expected to be sold in the 2012 season.

<u>Education</u>

Goal: Increase instruction and outreach by partnering with the non-profit group Friends of the Environment as well as the Cleveland Career Development and Technical Center and Delta State University's Division of Family and Consumer Sciences to pilot three programs: Sustainable Table, Greenhouse/Home Gardening, and Neighborhood Chef.

Sustainable Table.

- The Fall 2010 Sustainable Table workshop featured ways to use local food to make favorite southern dishes with a twist. The new recipes were lighter and healthier than traditional recipes.
    - Some of the dishes featured were: turkey with a local honey glaze, local mustard greens with garlic not ham or bacon grease, a sweet potato carrot risotto, sweet potato feta frittata, and dark chocolate brownies with sweet potatoes hidden inside.
    - The workshop was open to the public and advertised through the local media.

- Successes
    - The Fall 2010 Sustainable Table workshop listed above

- Challenges
    - The sustainable table intended to produce a series of workshops to teach food processing skills such as freezing, canning, and pickling local produce. This program experienced unforeseen circumstances that delayed the implementation of these workshops. Even though the grant for this project has ended there are still plans to implement these workshops.
    - The creation of a cookbook was also a goal of the Sustainable Table program. A call for recipes was made on the CFM blog and a modest number of recipes, 15 total, were collected. Mothlite Media agreed to print the cookbook but the cookbook was not completed within the timeframe of the grant. Plans are being

made to continue the development of the cookbook for publication and distribution in the future.

Greenhouse/Home Gardening.

- Bi-Monthly planting strategy meetings were conducted between Friends of the Environment (FOTE), and Cleveland Career Development and Technical Center (CCDTC).

- Seasonal Workshops
    - Spring (May 2010 & 2011) Greenhouse Planting workshops were held with Cleveland Vocational Students on seed selection, soil conservation, transplanting and marketing produce for the market.
        - May 2010: Twenty-two (22) Vocational Students participated in the in-school Training Session
        - May 2011: Thirty (30) Vocational Students participated in the in-school Training Session

    - Mid -summer (July 2010 and July 2011) planting workshops were held with youth gardeners, "The Alligator AGGIES," in Alligator, MS at the FOTE site. Topics included composting, late summer crop and best practices on how to grow and harvest herbs and flowers in the MS Delta, as well as marketing herbs at the local market.
        - July 2010- Seven (7) "Alligator AGGIES" Garden Club members were present
        - July 2011- Nine (9) "Alligator AGGIES" Garden Club members were present

    - Fall (September/ October 2010) An in-school planting workshop was held with twenty-six (26) Vocational Students on fall crops, cover crops, mulching, and winter greenhouse planting.

    - June (2010 & 2011) – Youth Entrepreneurial/Marketing Workshops on marketing produce at the CFM were held at the CCDTC. Twelve (12) Vocational students attended in June of 2010 and in 2011 the workshop was held in Alligator, MS with five (5) Alligator "AGGIES" attending.
        - The workshops were held in partnership with Alcorn State University Extension in Mound Bayou, MS; Mississippians Engaging in Greener Agriculture (MEGA) in Mound Bayou, MS; and the Mississippi State University Extension Master's Gardner's Program.

- Plant Sales

    - During Spring (May 2010 & 2011) and Fall (September 2010) plant sales were organized and held by FOTE and the CCDTC. Sales were for market consumers

in the County (Bolivar). A picture of a plant sale table can be found in the section titled *Additional Information* at the end of this report.

- Over 200 different plant varieties of produce, flowers and herbs were sold in both 2010 and 2011. These included: melons, tomatoes, cucumber, herbs- rosemary, basil, chives, carrots, flowers- sunflowers, marigolds, zinnias.
- The same Growers participated from both FOTE (7-9) and CCDTC (20-30) during 2010 & 2011 and hosted all plant sales. Typically 3-5 youth were present to vend at market on the two (2) Saturdays of the month which we sold produce. *We simply did not produce enough to sell at the market every Saturday.*
    - The youth worked at different stages in production: *from* greenhouse planting *to* transplanting *to* watering and weeding *to* harvesting *to* preparing produce for market *to* transporting produce to market *to* selling it at market *to* making deposit in bank account.

The GHG Committee along with the participating youth made several attempts to reach out and encourage more low-income residents living in the Cleveland area to come to the market. Flyers were made and sent home with Vo-Tech students. Committee Leaders also promoted the Market at Monthly PTA meetings in the area. Most often the response was that the market was held too early in the morning and there were not enough items of interest for sale (not enough fruit or items they would buy). As a result, CCDTC students with help from FOTE gardeners hosted a *Thanksgiving Greens (mustard and turnips) Sale.* The Greens were marketed using a *value- added* technique learned from one of the workshops. They were sold washed, cut, and bagged. Turnip Roots were also sold. The sale was located at the Cleveland Vo-Tech location from 10am – 2pm November 2010. Total profit: $70.00 (10 bags of turnip greens at $3 each, 10 bags of mustard greens at $3 each, and 10 turnip root bags at $1 each).

- Successes

    - GHG Program provided diversity and niche markets through non-traditional items: herbs, flowers, and different varieties of melons as well as using youth vendors to sell the items.

    - Students were eager to attend and sell produce at the Market despite the early check in time on Saturday mornings throughout the summer.

    - A bank account through a local credit union was established as a result of profits made by youth at the market. The youth agreed to put proceeds into a fund for workshops and small scholarships for students pursing Agriculture Studies Post Secondary.
        - Total income for the 2010 & 2011 seasons from joint FOTE/ CCDTC market sales was $450.00

- Challenges

    - Organizing students' participation during the summer months (June-July 2010 & 2011) to weed, water and harvest produce at both FOTE and CCDTC Sites.

    - Promoting the Farmers Market to low- income communities in the Cleveland neighbors and encouraging them to buy and support the efforts.

Neighborhood Chef.

- Due to scheduling difficulties, the intended activities were not carried out.
    - The program was partnered with the faculty of the Delta State University Family and Consumer Sciences department. Use of the department kitchen for demonstrations was intended but proved to be difficult to schedule around student and faculty use and the volunteers of the CFM.
    - The intent still exists among the CFM volunteers to provide demonstrations in the future.

Other

- Market production was documented through a market garden blog: http://clevelandfarmersmarket.blogspot.com/ This blog showcases opportunities for other area growers and backyard gardeners and encourage them to grow and sell with organic and natural practices.

<u>Infrastructure</u>

Goal: To enhance the presence of the market.

- The CFM equipment was inventoried in October 2009 and the needed equipment was purchased. This included five tables (six feet long), four tents (ten by ten feet), signage, and a shed for use of storing equipment and signage on site. Previously, this equipment and signage had been carried to and from the market each week.

- Infrastructure was continuously assessed throughout the 2011 market year. Much of the previously purchased materials and market shed have continued to hold up throughout 2011.
    - Ten new tents were purchased with the grant funds which have helped the farmer's market continue to grow and provide shelter from the elements for producers.

    - Several tents had broken hinges from wear and tear and were deconstructed for replacement parts that has saved the market from having to replace three tents during the season.

- By the opening of a midweek market, held on Wednesday afternoons, tents and tables were utilized by existing growers and producers as well as new partners that were not able to make it on Saturdays.

- Successes

    - The CFM benefited from new tables, tents, and signage.

    - The Friends Tent was opened were 10 friends were recruited and volunteered approximately 100 hours of service (18 friends showed interest).

- Challenges

    - Delta State University (DSU) was used as the fiscal agent for the grant, as per DSU policy, all equipment purchased under grants becomes the property of DSU. This presents a challenge in that future use of equipment beyond the grant, such as tents and the hoop house, will require an agreement between the university and the CFM.

<u>Access</u>

Goal: To incorporate an MDAC EBT machine and pilot a "token" program in conjunction with the "market cash" to target sales to low-income SNAP recipients with access to all interested market growers/vendors.

- Use of EBT and WIC Farmer's Market Vouchers were advertised among producers and consumers using various avenues such as the market itself, and publicity and promotion campaigns (posters, blog, facebook, and faith based outreach).

- Acceptance of EBT and WIC vouchers increased among producers.

- Use of EBT and WIC vouchers increased among consumers attending the market, although not by a large amount.

- Efforts are continuing to help producers see the benefit of accepting EBT and WIC vouchers.

- Successes

    - Some growers are beginning to see the benefit of accepting the EBT and WIC vouchers, but more time is needed for a larger number of growers to join in this effort.

- Challenges
    - Use of EBT was limited. Throughout the 2011 season it was only used by consumers on one Saturday market day; a total of $5 was sold using EBT that day. More advertisement is needed to make consumers aware of this payment option.

Other

The CFM established a Market Garden within the city of Cleveland, MS on two acres of vacant property donated by a member of the Friends group. The Market Garden was cultivated and maintained by any interested market gardeners on a volunteer basis and a high tunnel was used for growing. All produce was grown organically. During Fall 2011 the property switched hands and it was requested that the Market Garden be dissembled. The CFM is interested in finding a new location to resume the Market Garden but such a location has not been determined to date.

Beneficiaries

In general, three categories of people benefited from the CFM, they were: farmers/vendors, consumers, and the city. The farmers benefited by having a market from which to sell their goods directly to willing consumers. Direct sales to consumers have allowed farmers to keep all of their profit. Promotional efforts were made to not only attract long time sellers with the CFM but to encourage new sellers to join the market. Some of these promotional materials are seen in the section titled *Additional Information* at the end of this report. A total of 20 different growers participated in the 2011 market season. An average of 4-5 growers participated each Saturday of the season with a high of 9 and a low of 3. An average of 5 producers participated each Wednesday of the season with a high of 6 and a low of 4. The grant allowed the market to also benefit from new equipment such as tables, tents, and a shed where all the materials could be stored on site for easy set up that did not require travel each market day.

The consumers benefited by increased awareness of market availability. The market was offered not only on Saturdays but also midweek on Wednesdays making the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables more convenient. The Saturday markets were open for business from 8a.m. (or earlier) to 12:00 noon and the Wednesday markets were open for business from 4p.m. (or earlier) to 6p.m. An average of 121 consumers attended the Saturday market in the 2011 season with a season high of 260 and a season low of 16. An average of 112 consumers attended the midweek Wednesday market with a season high of 151 and a low of 50. The allowable use of EBT and WIC vouchers opened the door to a wider consumer base, however, consumer use of the EBT was limited. Additionally, some local restaurant owners benefited from the market by purchasing greens and tomatoes for use in their menus. In turn, consumers visiting these restaurants were also able to enjoy the benefits of these locally grown foods. These restaurants included *Hey Joes* and *Mississippi Grounds* both located in Cleveland, MS.

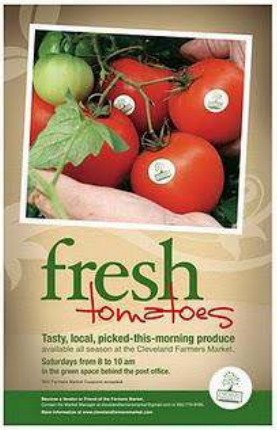
The City of Cleveland also benefited because the market recycled the dollars right within the community as growers were able to take their proceeds and make purchases. As the market has grown, a sense of community has also grown among the farmers, restaurant owners, and consumers who frequent the market. There are still more growers and consumers to be reached with the market and plans are underway for the 2012 market year.

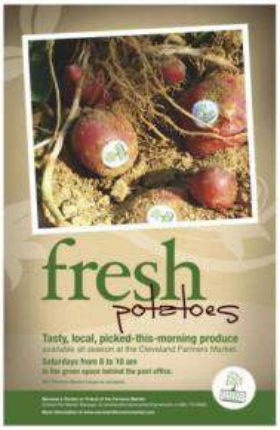
Lessons Learned

- The CFM consists of a group of dedicated volunteers who are also involved in a number of other activities in their personal and professional lives. Although these individuals are dedicated to the cause of the CFM it was a times hard to maintain motivation among the group. As a result some planned activities of the CFM were not fully carried out (i.e. the cookbook and Neighborhood Chef). At the most recent meeting of the group, held December 15, 2011 the following was discussed as ways to maintain motivation:
    - Hold consistent monthly meetings. Meetings are set to occur every 3rd Thursday at 6:00p.m. throughout 2012.
    - As new grants are sought, a modest personnel line will be added to the budget for a project manager. This monetary incentive will help maintain the motivation of the project manager and increase the sense of accountability for the success of each part of the CFM project.
    - A monthly news letter may also help maintain the excitement and motivation of all volunteers. Plans for the creation of a monthly news letter are underway.
- Increased attendance at the Saturday market by both growers and consumers was noted to occur when other events were scheduled at the same time (i.e. musical performances and the Humane Society bake sale). Such dual scheduling will continue to be planned when possible.
- Working with a university as fiscal manager can be challenging as university policy with regard to purchasing and maintaining goods must be followed. In the future, an even closer working relationship between the volunteers of the CFM and DSU will be beneficial.

Additional Information

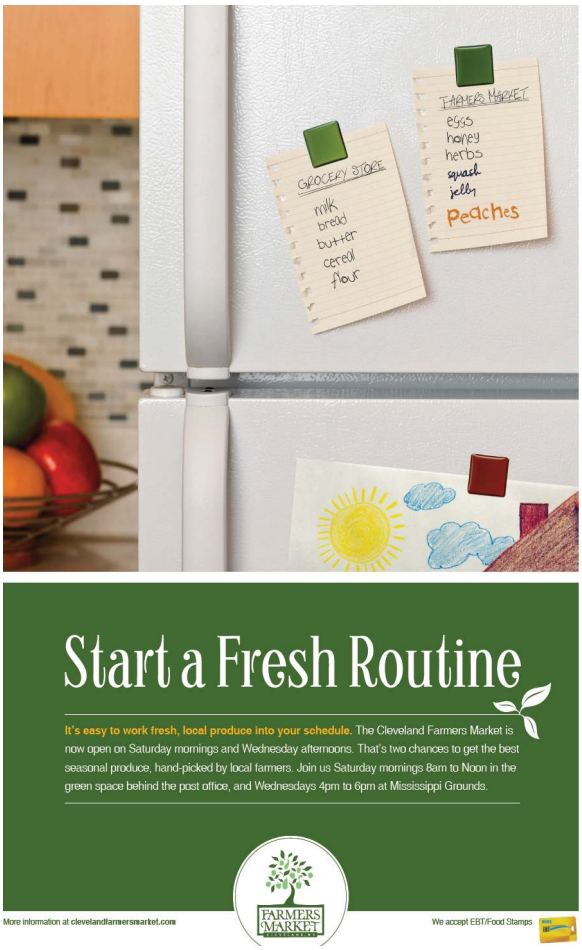
- The Cleveland Farmer's Market (CFM) Blog can be viewed at: clevelandfarmersmarket.blogspot.com
- Examples of the "Fresh" promotional posters used to advertise the CFM:





- Examples of the "You are what you eat" t-shirts to advertise the CFM:

- Examples of the "Start a Fresh Routine" promotional posters:



- Pictures of activity with the CFM in 2010 and 2011

Victor, Ben, and Eric at The Friends of the Market table

Grower Victor from Beaver Dam Farms in Indianola, MS

Future Farmers of America students from Cleveland Career Development and Technical Center participated in plant sales with the Greenhouse Home Gardening educational program

Sustainable Table's Eleanor Green shows how easy it is to make healthy, delicious food at a 2010 fall food demonstration

- A Newspaper article done on the CFM is pasted below and can also found at http://www.bolivarcom.com/view/full_story/12802692/article-Farm-fresh?instance=most_popular

Farm fresh

by Aimee Robinette

04.15.11 - 02:26 pm

Fresh, locally grown produce served at your favorite restaurants in town is becoming a reality for Cleveland Farmer's Market farm-to-table mission.

Ryan Betz, manager of the market, said fresh produce that is grown locally is the perfect way to connect people to their food.

"Be sure to patronize these establishments and express your appreciation for their support of small farmers and producers," said Michelle Johanson, member of the Cleveland Farmer's Market. "This is an exciting new step for the market's farm-to-table mission."

Nick Griffith, one of the owners of The Roof, said they have been buying local produce for several years, but added that it is really becoming more and more popular to do so.

"We buy lettuce and tomatoes from a local produce company," said Nick Griffith, co owner of

The Roof. “It started out years ago, we liked to do business locally whenever possible. But it’s turned into a movement to buy things local. When you buy locally, you are helping the economy where you live. We depend on them for our business, so it’s only natural to buy from them in turn.”

Aaron Lasker, manager of the Cleveland Country Club, said he buys local to support the farming effort.

“It’s also a better quality,” he added. “It’s crisper, fresher and cleaner. I know what I’m serving our members. I am getting it two blocks away instead of 2,000 miles away.

“Beaver Dam Farms in Indianola now has hormone-free, grass-fed, pasture-raised, antibiotic-free chickens for sale,” Johanson said.

Local restaurants are also taking advantage of this product as well.

“If you never had a free-range chicken, you don’t know what good eggs taste like,” Lasker said.

Betz agreed.

“Buying local produce ensures that it is fresher, tastier and even more nutritional since it hasn’t been sitting around for a while as it makes its way to the consumer,” he said. “I would like to encourage the community to patron these places. By doing so, you are supporting your neighbors.”

Mississippi Grounds and Hey Joe's also serve local produce.

The Cleveland Farmer’s Market will be open at the Mississippi Grounds parking lot during the 42nd Annual Crosstie Arts and Jazz Festival.

Betz said it’s huge that they are able to open their season early. Usually the market does not begin until May.

That is something that both Betz and Jesse Strassburg, who is also with the market, want their growers to embrace.

“We want to expose them to more opportunities,” he said. “This includes not only earlier production, but alternative crops like lettuce as well.”

Leafy spring produce, fresh, hand-canned produce, new tote bags and other locally grown fruits

and vegetables will be for sale.

Information, such as vendor applications or how to get more involved with the market will also be available.

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