

Promoting the Columbus County Community Farmers Market through Research and Partnerships

Columbus Community Farmers Market, Inc. of Whiteville, NC received \$18,000 to develop a comprehensive plan to improve attendance, income, number of farmer vendors and use of senior and WIC coupons at the Columbus County Farmers Market. Funds were used to pay for: market research and business planning; the development of a community advisory committee; and advertising, promotional, and other marketing activities.

Final Report

**Columbus County Community Farmers Market
USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) Progress Report
May 15, 2010 (Final Report)**

RESEARCH

- Designed and conducted a Farmers Market Survey for patrons and non-patrons; Received more than 100 responses
- Designed and conducted, with assistance from the Columbus County Department of Social Services, a Farmers Market survey for EBT recipients; Received approximately 80 responses
- Reviewed the results of the surveys with the Farmers Market Board of Directors to determine the focus of 2009 marketing initiatives
- Shared results of both surveys with the North Carolina Fruit & Veggie Coalition and the 21st Century Farmers Market Program for use throughout the State of North Carolina.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

- Joined the Greater Whiteville Chamber of Commerce as a non-profit community organization
- Hosted a press conference announcement of our receipt of the 2008 USDA FMPP grant. Congressman Mike McIntyre made the check presentation to members of the Farmers Market Board of Directors
- Hosted a 2009 Farmers Market Annual Meeting which included a catered meal. Congressman Mike McIntyre was the guest speaker (see program and invitation attached).
- Invited all of our Community Partners to attend and participate in the annual meeting
- Excellent media coverage for the event including television, radio and newspaper
- Prepared and printed a 2008 annual report; distributed the annual report at the annual meeting and by mail to non-attendees
- Hosted a Farmers Market field trip for more than 1,200 Kindergarten through fifth grade students from Whiteville City Schools. All students were from schools participating in the USDA Fresh Fruits & Vegetables (FFV) program.
- USDA FMPP funds were used to pay for transportation costs for their school field trip to the Farmers Market. Farmers Market vendors and representatives of the Columbus County Cooperative Extension Service conducted an educational program and gave samples of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Planned and hosted a special event during each month of the 2009 Market season (see list attached)
- Made various presentations and provided table top display at civic clubs, local hospital, and schools during the off-season (January through April 2010).
- Hosted a 2010 Farmers Market Annual Meeting which included a catered meal. Brenda Sutton, The Produce Lady, was the guest speaker (see program and invitation attached)
- Invited all of our Community Partners to attend and participate in the annual meeting
- Prepared and printed a 2009 annual report; distributed the annual report at the annual meeting and by mail to non-attendees

MARKETING INITIATIVES

- Sponsored a poster contest for students Kindergarten through fifth grade around the theme "Happy, Healthy, Homegrown." Printed and distributed more than 100 promotional posters throughout the region.
- Participated with a table top display booth in the 2009 Spring & Grow Business Expo in Bladen County; hosted by the Elizabethtown White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce
- Hosted a special opening day ceremony that involved more than 600 attendees including local elected officials, Scouts, and elementary school student entertainers (see program attached)
- Purchased a variety of promotional materials (i.e., keychains, brochures, magnets, calendar business cards, etc.) for distribution at the 2009 annual meeting
- Maintained and expanded the Columbus County Community Farmers Market website at www.columbuscountymarket.com
- Developed and implemented a weekly e-newsletter using a subscription service through Constant Contact. E-newsletters are archived for future reference on our website.
- Designed, printed and distributed more than 30,000 *Farmers Market News* publications through area newspapers. Community partners and other business merchants assisted in distributing the publication through their various outlets.
- Promoted the Farmers Market on the internet through LocalHarvest, online listing with the Greater Whiteville Chamber of Commerce.
- Participated in the American Farmland Trust "America's Favorite Farmers Markets" national recognition contest; Printed and distributed full-color flyers to promote our participation and encourage customers to vote for our Market.
- Advertised in three (3) local newspapers and on four (4) local radio stations
- Contracted with local radio station to host a live remote broadcast during the month special events (see list attached)
- Participated with a table top display booth at the Columbus County Department of Aging Senior Picnic at which we promoted the USDA Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program voucher program.
- Participated with a table top display booth at the Whiteville Health Festival hosted by the Whiteville Downtown Development Commission and Columbus Regional Healthcare System
- Prepared and printed a rack card for use in promoting the new SNAP EBT, Credit & Debit Card acceptance at the Farmers Market (sample attached)
- Placed a table top display with the rack cards and other information for one week prior to the opening of the 2009 market season at the Columbus County Department of Social Services
- Provided a number of promotional marketing materials including brochures, window decals, pens, pencils, t-shirts, etc. at least one (1) special event per month (see list attached)
- Sponsored a poster contest for students Kindergarten through fifth grade around the theme "Eat Smart, Be Healthy, Live Strong." Printed and distributed more than 100 promotional posters throughout the region.
- Prepared and published 28,000 copies of the 2010 Farmers Market News and distributed through area newspapers as well as in restaurants, hotels, and other businesses.
- Collaborated with Southeastern Community College and the Columbus County Cooperative Extension Service to host a 12-hour "How to Start a Food Business" seminar at the Farmers Market to promote direct-to-consumer sales of fresh produce as well as value-added products.

- Hosted a special opening day ceremony in 2010 that involved more than 500 attendees including local elected officials, Scouts, and elementary school student entertainers (see program attached)
- To encourage better health and fitness, hosted a Farmers Market Fun Run & Walk that involved more than 125 people. Adults participated in a 3-mile run/walk and the children completed a ¼ mile fun run.
- Planned and are conducting a special event during each month of the 2010 Market season (see list attached)

PERSONNEL

- Columbus County Community Farmers Market contracted with Kipling Godwin & Associates to provide marketing, promotional and public relations services.