

Expansion of the Rutherford, NJ, Farmers Market and Its Related Promotion Requirements

Rutherford Downtown Partnership of Rutherford, NJ received \$17,050 to implement an advertising campaign to attract new farmers, vendors, and customers to the Rutherford Farmers Market; and introduce four (4) composting systems for the market to reduce waste disposal costs. Funds were used to pay for advertising for the market and its new composters; and to purchase four composting barrels for the market.

Final Report



Final Report – September 2010 Expansion of the Rutherford, NJ Farmers’ Market and Its Related Promotion Requirements

Agreement #12-25-G-0734/FMPP NJ-117-2008

Background – The Rutherford Downtown Partnership (RDP) is a non-profit, special improvement district, corporation founded in 1997 for the purpose of promoting and revitalizing the downtown commercial district of Rutherford, New Jersey. The RDP has, since 1998, sponsored a Farmers’ Market that operates weekly from the beginning of June to the end of October. It is part of the Jersey Fresh program that promotes New Jersey farmers and their products. Since its inception, two New Jersey farmers attended this market to sell their produce directly to the public. At various times over the first ten years of operation, the Rutherford Farmers’ Market has added a pickle vendor, an Amish baker, a vendor of frozen seafood and pasta, an Italian bread and cheese vendor, and a stuffed cabbage roll vendor. (The first three of these are still coming to the market; the last two are not.

Weekly customer counts over the years have ranged from a few hundred to over a thousand depending on weather, and local vacation patterns. The Rutherford Downtown Partnership each year put some of its budget to the promotion of the farmers’ market, and provided the professional services of its Manager to run the Farmers Market recognizing that the Market runs well with minimal management. The RDP has never made any profit from the event; but making a profit has never been a critical concern, as it was always seen as a means to attracting customers to the downtown for the benefit of other existing businesses.

Recognizing that the market was relatively small, the RDP requested and received a small grant from the US Department of Agriculture Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) in October 2008 for the purpose of finding ways to expand this Farmers’ Market and its related promotion requirements. The intent was to find ways in which the Market could be economically more sustainable.

The Rutherford Farmers’ Market has traditionally been described by vendors as well as customers as the best farmers’ market in northern New Jersey. Many of the existing vendors have been coming back for years and they work well together. The Rutherford Downtown Partnership has a staff of 1 ½ paid employees, and is responsible for numerous events throughout the spring, summer and fall, as well as special maintenance of the downtown area, and façade/sign and awning renovations for local businesses. With respect to the Farmers’ Market the RDP staff handles the registration of vendors, making sure they pay the necessary fees, that they are cleared by the local health department, and have adequate insurance

coverage. The RDP staff is also responsible for placing all ads for the Market, the printing and installation of local area signs and banners for the Market, and the weekly installation of special pennant banners at the Market plaza. Beyond that, the Rutherford Farmers' Market seems to run itself, with few if any issues arising during the season.

Original marketing efforts for the Rutherford Farmers' Market included:

- advertisements most weeks in one local weekly newspaper (which for the past three years had been a sponsor of the market, thereby providing free in-kind contribution of ad space),
- paid advertisements once a month in each of two other local weekly newspapers,
- press releases to those same papers about the market, and
- a banner over the main street of our town throughout the summer months identifying the times and place of the farmers' market.

Early on in the history of the market we had identified that the addition of balloons, music, or other events for children at the market did not bring in the shopping public, and so funding for those activities was ended after the first 2-3 years.

We had spent a fair degree of time up to 2008 trying to find a third farmer for the market to sell organic fruits and vegetables, but to no avail. Our thought was that an organic farmer would generate interest from a different group of shoppers, and would thereby expand the number of consumer dollars brought to the market each week. Simply adding a third farmer without expanding the customer base would, we feared, split the existing sales between three farmers. Therefore, any addition to the size of the market in terms of vendors would have to be matched by an increase in customers.

The Project as Originally Proposed - The work undertaken under this grant was to expand the market with recruitment of additional farmers, and to expand the marketing efforts to attract a larger customer base. In addition we looked to add composting for waste management of our market.

We hoped to

- 1) double the size of the market, including adding two extra New Jersey farmers;
- 2) expand the marketing to reach a larger customer base;
- 3) introduce composting at the Farmers' Market to area residents, thereby reducing the volume of neighborhood garbage pick-ups; and
- 4) evaluate this expansion exercise to demonstrate to other small markets how to effectively expand for the benefit of their communities and farmers.

Challenges in the Research Design - Two constraints on this work have meant that the full focus of the project, as described in the original application were not possible. The first was the awarding of the contract for \$17, 050.00 instead of the original project application request of \$33,290.00. Therefore nearly half of the efforts originally proposed were not possible, right from the start. Second, the application was accepted in September 2008, right at the beginning of a long recession period, which we are still facing. The impact of this economic environment has influenced many of the ideas that we wished to pursue under this grant, as well as the interest of the shoppers at our market to spend as much as they had previously, let alone spend more. As the assessments of what transpired, presented below will indicate, these factors have both limited our ability to double the size of the market. We have, however, reached a number of conclusions about what will work for expansions under certain economic conditions.

Work that was performed –1) Increased **Vendor Recruitment** - During the first six months of the project we were able to visit other northern New Jersey Farmer’s Markets to see the make-up of vendors in those locations, to see if there were any new types of vendors that worked well with the Farmers’ Market concept that we had not thought about, and the visibility/marketing of those markets in comparison to the number of people in attendance. We also investigated the types of vendors that were resident in some larger cities with year round in-door markets. This latter group of markets (including Faneuil Hall Market in Boston, and the Farmers’ Market in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada) showed a wide range of products that could generate extra interest in their markets.

As a result we searched for possible vendors in northern New Jersey who would be interested in selling any of the following types of products.

- Beeswax candles and honey
- Indian food – ready to eat
- Organic farmer
- Yarn and knitting supplies
- Jewelry
- Artists
- Silk Scarves
- Stained glass
- Belgian waffles
- Crepes
- Frozen fruit
- Maple products
- Chocolates
- Goat by-products
- Jams and jellies
- Homemade frozen pot pies
- Soy products
- Leather products
- Polish foods
- Apple and other fruit ciders
- Buskers and music
- Herbs
- Wrought iron work
- Wood carvings and bread boards
- Boutique/handmade clothing
- African women’s crafts
- Fresh squeezed juice
- Wreaths
- Fudge
- Photographic art work.

The Rutherford Farmers’ Market has been designed since day one to be a market that draws customers into our downtown on Wednesdays (an otherwise slow business day for the downtown). As a result of this initial goal, the Market works to make sure that vendors at the Market do not compete with any local business. Our downtown has roughly 300 businesses, with a mixture of professional and service offices, consumer service businesses, about 35 food establishments, and about 35 retailers of various kinds. It is fairly easy to

identify what would be unwanted competition for our limited number of local food and retail businesses, and for the most part the above list posed no threat to those businesses.

Throughout these efforts we identified that the growth of farmers' markets requires careful planning. We recognized that despite there being many different types of products that could compliment a farmers' market, too many non-food items (or even non-grown products), could create more of a "flea market" feel to the market, detracting from the focus on fresh food. So while we did add a natural soap vendor, we were careful not to add too many non-grown products (including crafts) to the market.

2. Marketing -

Expansion of the Market Days. During the summer of 2009 one of our Farmers' approached us with the proposal that we add a second day of the market. They had just cancelled out of a nearby market on Saturdays, which had turned into more of a Flea Market than a Farmers' Market. We had considered Saturday for a number of years, but had never wanted to give up on Wednesday (as this middle of the week had benefits of drawing customers to the downtown on an otherwise slow business day). We recognized that Saturday shoppers were likely to be people who worked out of town and couldn't get to the Wednesday market, and as a result we were not concerned that the two market days would divide the sales between two days. We were confident that it would bring other people to the downtown, adding to sales for both the farmer and the local businesses.

Increased Vendor Recruitment– Through this project we were successful in finding, for 2009, an iced coffee/lemonade vendor; a natural soap vendor; a local florist; a smoothie vendor; and a dried fruit and nuts vendor. These four added to our existing mix of two New Jersey farmers, an Amish baker, a frozen pasta vendor, a seafood seller, and a pickle vendor. While we spent a lot of time looking for an organic farmer to come to our market, we were unsuccessful in finding any that were willing to travel to our area. Admittedly, the number of farms in close proximity to our town is limited. Even the farmers we do have at the market travel quite a distance to be here each week. Throughout this process we learned that not every community can find its "ideal mix" of vendors. Geography and urban/rural mixes will play a large part in even finding preferred types of businesses. Attracting them to commit to coming to a market is another thing. And so, our 2009 market ended with more vendors and different types of vendors than we had had in 2008 even if we were not able to double the number of vendors.

For the 2010 season the recruitment of additional vendors continued. Our two farmers returned once again (although one is now questioning whether they will continue due to decreased sales as the economy continues to be a problem). We also have been successful in keeping the frozen pasta and seafood vendor, pickle vendor, and local florist. We have added for 2010 a different natural soap vendor, a different organic tea vendor, a quiche vendor, a cheesecake vendor, a NJ alpaca and llama farmer that sells products made with the wool from his animals, local artists, and a different dried fruit and nut vendor.

For 2009 we decided to limit the new Saturday market option to just the one Farmer. The second Farmer had already told us he wasn't interested, as he couldn't staff his table on the second day. Bringing in the other related vendors for Saturday was going to require extra management/staffing time, while just one farmer/vendor who knew the town rules, and who simply had to make customers and neighboring businesses happy would not require an overseeing manager, other than to be available by cell phone in the event that something

happened. The result of this initiative was to bring fresh produce to our downtown on more than just the one day. The interested farmer also was able to bring his customers from his previous Saturday market to his new location, thus bringing some new shoppers to our downtown area. The people who came on Saturday were mostly new shoppers, and so we were, through this initiative, encouraging more people to come to our downtown on another day as well. This arrangement of just one farmer on Saturday actually worked well, and has been continued for the 2010 season. New shoppers were drawn to the downtown because of this farmer, and there has been a spin-off effect for other local businesses.

Increased Marketing. The advertising for the Farmers' Market in 2009 reached beyond our normal geographic area through several additional newspapers to a larger population base. The radius of coverage was nonetheless limited to 5 miles, with the calculation that people would not travel further than that for food shopping. The fact that there are other farmers' markets bordering on that five mile radius, also influenced the publications that we were interested in pursuing. As a result, we expanded our previous advertising in The South Bergenite and Leader and Clifton Journal newspapers by adding more frequent ads in the Clifton Journal and monthly ads in the Secaucus Reporter /owned by the Hudson Reporter. We also found a way to have the Market Manager interviewed on a 5 minute spot on the local cable TV network, discussing the Market and its features.

Throughout the months of the 2009 Market, we conducted surveys of the people who came to the market to identify where they lived. Forty-four percent of the shoppers at the market were from Rutherford (the town hosting the market), and another 17% were from the two towns that immediately abut Rutherford. Fully 82% came from the towns reached by the three initial newspapers. The remaining 18% was composed of people who lived in a wide scattering of other New Jersey communities but who worked in Rutherford and were at the market during their lunch hours, or individuals who were visiting family members who lived in the area (and were most likely not going to be back at the market again.) The lesson here was that a further reach of advertising was not necessary. We were not drawing any larger crowds into the market through our outreach to other newspapers surrounding the immediate area. As a further note, by advertising in 2009 in the Secaucus Reporter, the Mayor of that town decided to start their own Farmer's Market in 2010. We have determined from this action that residents of that town will now be less likely to travel to Rutherford for fresh produce when they can buy it in their own town.

With the grant funding, we also developed a consistent image for ads and posters for the market. Regardless of the print media, the same ad was used. We do believe from comments that we heard that this was a good step. People came to recognize the image and be reminded of the market. Despite the continuation of the recession, we heard from our vendors that the Rutherford Farmers' Market continued to be their best market.

3) Introduction of composting at the Farmers' Market – Throughout the winter, spring, summer and early fall of 2009 the Rutherford Downtown Partnership Manager (also the Manager of the Rutherford Farmers' Market) entered into numerous discussions and meetings with Borough officials in an attempt to develop a workable plan for composting of vegetative waste from the Farmers' Market. Spinning composters were identified with sufficient size for to handle the weekly waste. Fencing to go around the composters was discussed as a means of limiting access, keeping the area of the composters attractive, preventing rodent access, and generating soil quickly. While some of the Borough Council members approved of the concept (wanting to showcase the composters at the market, in

order to interest residents in composting as a means of limiting garbage weight going to the landfills), other Council members were determined to prevent the placement of the composters in the plaza in the center of town. Other sites were discussed, but no solutions seemed to exist that would make it easy for the farmers to dispose of their vegetative waste at the end of each market. It would be easier in the farmers' minds to just load the waste onto their trucks and dispose of it back at their farms, if it couldn't be left as garbage at the end of the day.

In the late fall of 2009 a new initiative emerged in the town, whereby a community garden was planned at a park one mile away from our downtown. The community garden would include a small tree nursery and raised planter beds for growing fruits and vegetables. The food grown would be donated to our community food pantry, and the work would be done by volunteers, and students learning about growing food. The organizing group for the community garden was eager to receive the compostable material from the Farmers' and to turn it into soil if the composters could be installed at their location.

In January of 2010 an agreement was made that we would purchase two spinning composters with the grant money (as originally proposed) as well as two barrels on wheels. The composters would be set up at the community teaching garden, where the resulting soil could be close at hand to the location where it was needed. The barrels would be delivered by the Public Works Department to the Farmers' Market every Market day and left for the farmers' to fill with whatever they wanted composted. The Public Works Department would then take the barrels the next morning to the composters and dump their contents into the composters, and store the barrels until the next market day. Because this plan was only approved by the Mayor and Council in February of 2010, the composters and barrels have been purchased at the end of the grant.

They have been in use throughout the 2010 Farmers Market season, with great success. The composters are producing soil quickly. The compostable vegetation supply is ideal for this use, and the community garden initiative is teaching their volunteers and visitors about composting while receiving some very good press coverage about the composters.

Promotion of Composting at the Market - We did work throughout the spring and summer of 2009 with a group of highly motivated high school girls who wanted to start their own business. The original plan was for the student-owned business to sell composters, and other environmentally friendly products at our Farmers' Market. A number of obstacles, however, meant that they were not able to be operational before the end of the 2009 summer season. Despite starting with the students in February to outline what it would take to start a business, and how they might design it, the girls did not actively begin their work until June. They also ran into difficulties in terms of agreeing among themselves as to the name of their business, what it would sell, and how those sales could be arranged. None of the girls' parents wanted to be involved initially at any level, nor did they want to have their names attached to this business for registration or bank account purposes (in case of potential liability claims); yet in New Jersey there are requirements for parental sign offs for minors registering the business, as well as opening a bank account. Ultimately one parent did sign off on both the registration and the bank account, and agreed that products ordered by the public and then ordered and shipped by the manufacturer could be delivered to their home.

By the middle of August, the girls were ready with their business. They had found a few green products that they wanted to sell where manufacturers would ship in low volume, but this did not include composters (as they could not find a company willing to supply a model that they could show their customers).

Additionally, the Recycling Coordinator for the town entered into an initiative during the 2009 summer season to have the Borough sell composters to any local resident that wished to buy one. Despite our notification of the intent of this summer business, and its connection to our grant, the Borough went ahead with its composter sales, ensuring that there would be either no market (or at best intensive competition) for this startup venture. The girls did get their business registered and bank account set up, but too late for the 2009 Farmers' Market season. The girls decided to try to sell green stationary supplies to school stores during the 2009-2010 school years, and never did open a stand at our, or any other, farmers' market.

While we are pleased that the Borough of Rutherford has made strides to get increased public recognition for composting, and we are pleased that a local source for the units is available, we are disappointed that this initiative has kept our high school student business from moving in this direction for the 2010 Farmers' Market season.

Conclusions on Introducing Composting - The diminished amount of the grant (from what was originally requested), the delays brought about by the political process, and the challenges of consensus building among officials all resulted in a delay in full implementation of a part of the composting component of the grant and meant that the full study of the impact of composting on the ultimate tonnage of garbage collected by the town could not be undertaken at all.

The publicity being generated by our Farmers' Market composters at the Community Garden are, in 2010, however producing an increased public awareness of the value of composting. We believe that encouraging the growth and sale of local produce, as well as composting are lifestyle choices that will help our ecosystem as well as our economy over time. By incorporating the composters into the community teaching garden, there is now a system in place to pass information about the value of composting and growing food to both adult volunteers and students at the garden. Those educational opportunities provided by the composters would not have happened if they had been installed as originally planned at the plaza where the Farmers' Market is located.

As noted above our efforts to encourage a group of students to set up a business that might sell composters to the public at our Farmers' Market was also met with a range of challenges. We still believe that the original plan to have composters sold at the Farmers' Markets would have had further potential to raise awareness for this mode of dealing with vegetative waste. The fact that the students (despite being highly motivated to start a business) had problems getting their business set up, has led us to the conclusion that finding an existing business to come in and sell the composters at the market would have been a better option.

Conclusion: An Approach to Assessing the Vendor and Marketing Mix for a Farmers' Market. Based on the experiences gained by the tasks of this grant, we have identified the following steps in Farmers' Market planning, that we believe are universal for all Markets, regardless of whether they are in urban or rural settings.

Vendor Mix

1. Assess the type of Farmers' Market products that will sell well together in the Market's location, noting particularly products that will not be in competition with local businesses.
2. Identify market vendors that sell the products identified. This can be done by referral, internet searches, and talking with similar vendors at other nearby markets. (Often a market vendor at another market may be looking for a location for another day, or may be interested in sending out another crew to a second location on the same day.)
3. Make sure that there is more food and consumable products at the market than crafts or local services.
4. Provide more space for farmers' displays so that they are prominent.
5. Offer space to both non-profit community groups and to local businesses for free.

Marketing

1. Identify where people are coming from to attend the Market.
2. Identify other Markets in the area and draw a circle on a map with a radius no further than the next closest market. If there are no other markets in a fairly large region, the circle may be limited to a reasonable distance beyond which it is presumed that people will not travel to shop for food. (This distance will vary depending on the density of the population base in the area.)
3. Look for media that services the area within the defined circle. Media choices include print media, radio, TV, and social networking.
4. Find ways to get as much media coverage as possible for free. This is done either by using free media options (calendar sections of newspapers), or identifying options whereby media coverage is given in exchange for name recognition for the company.
5. Search for sponsors who may be able to provide a cash infusion that can be used to purchase canvas bags to give to market shoppers. Bags can be imprinted with the name of the market on one side and the sponsor's name or logo on the other side. Bags then can be used a free gift for market customers who are willing to answer a few quick survey questions, including what town they live in, and an email address for contact on future events that are happening in the area. This provides:
 - a. a free way to make customers happy (they received something for free),
 - b. data on the geographic reach of the market,
 - c. spread the name of the market and the sponsor further (people will use the bags year round in many different locations where they will be widely seen), and
 - d. an email list to tell people of new vendors coming in to the Market as well as other community-based events

Other Ways of Building Community Interest

1. Identify possible other ways to generate community interest in the market. (Composting is one such example that helps the market offer a service to its farmers, while building recognition for the market and the community garden in Rutherford's case).
2. Offer free table space to local community groups to do fundraising or volunteer recruitment at the market. Those groups will remind their membership and friends to meet them at the Market, thus generating an additional customer base.
3. Offer local schools the chance to visit the market and talk with the farmers present. With elementary school groups, parents will come along as chaperones, and will see the interest of their children in the initiative. Often those same parents will be back, with or without their children on subsequent weeks.

Funding To Date.

To date we have requested, and received, a first installment of the grant funds totaling \$4370.00. This amount was requested to offset:

- The purchase of the spinning composters (\$1500)
- Personnel time of \$2350.
- Overhead of \$520.

Final Request for Funding Reimbursement. As per the attached schedule, which was submitted in June, 2010, we are requesting payment of our final funding reimbursement in the amount of \$11,803.27.

Additional information. Included as appendices to this report are copies of advertisements, and posters.

Submitted by,

Robin Reenstra-Bryant, Manager
Rutherford Downtown Partnership
Rutherford Farmers' Market
176 Park Avenue
Rutherford, NJ 07070
201-460-3000 x 3156
201-460-3003 fax
downtownpartnership@rutherford-nj.com