

The New Farmer Development Project

Council on the Environment, Inc of New York, NY received \$53,125 to provide training, educational programs, and resources for the development of immigrant farmers' farm-based businesses and increase their participation in local farmers markets. Funds were used to pay for project management costs, training for the new farmers; travel expenses to visit potential and existing farm sites; to conduct on-site training sessions for new farmers at the farms; and pay for printed training materials.

Final Report

**USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program 2008 Grantee
From the Roots - Brooklyn Farmers' Marketing Network
Brooklyn District Public Health Office,
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Final Report**

- **Summary of issue or problem being examined**

Communities across the United States are struggling with rising rates of obesity and the serious impact that obesity and diet-related illness are having on community health outcomes and resources. In many parts of New York, particularly in low-income neighborhoods like North and Central Brooklyn, the adult obesity rate has risen to almost 30%, while diabetes affects an estimated 12-14% of adults in these neighborhoods.¹ In New York City like many municipalities nationwide, public health professionals are examining how improved access to fruits, vegetables, and other health-promoting foods can play a role in reversing the epidemic of obesity and diabetes that threatens to undermine population health gains that have been made in recent decades. Due to the structure and density of urban neighborhoods as well as decades of disinvestment, many low-income communities in North and Central Brooklyn lack adequate supermarkets and other stores selling healthier foods; Bushwick and Bedford Stuyvesant have amongst the lowest ratios of supermarkets per population in New York City, with about one store to serve every 10,000 people.² In this context, farmers' markets have emerged as an important part of efforts to promote healthy food access in urban communities and can play a role as engines of growth and development both for local neighborhoods and for state and regional economies.

In recent years, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has worked in partnership with farmers' market operators and community organizations to promote markets in low-income communities throughout the city as a way to promote improved food access and community health. While markets in neighborhoods like the South Bronx and Northern Manhattan have thrived through these efforts, farmers' markets in North and Central Brooklyn have struggled over the past few years to attract enough farmer vendors and customers to make the markets viable. Surveys with local residents have found that although many people are concerned about their dietary health, customers' lack of awareness about farmers' markets and fresh-farm produce and individual eating habits that favor processed foods make it less likely that residents will take advantage of this resource. Without sufficient customer demand, the number of vendors willing to sell at North and Central Brooklyn markets has remained low, creating a cycle that undermines the benefit of these markets for both local residents and farm vendors. The *From the Roots - Brooklyn Farmers' Marketing Network* administered by the Health Department's Brooklyn District Public Health Office (DPHO) sought to address the twin issues of supply and demand for healthier food options in low-income Brooklyn neighborhoods. In partnership with local markets, the Brooklyn DPHO developed a community outreach and marketing initiative in three neighborhoods of Brooklyn: Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick to increase the number of vendors selling at participating markets, increase customer awareness about local markets, and increase customer purchases and farmer revenues.

- **Description of how the issue or problem was addressed**

To address the issues of supply of and demand for healthier food options through local markets, the DPHO focused on the following objectives: 1) develop a network of market operators in North/Central Brooklyn to share resources and best practices for farmers' market promotion, 2) increase the number of farmers selling at participating markets to increase produce quantity and variety, 3) increase residents' awareness of local markets through a community mobilization and outreach campaign, and 4) increase the convenience of purchasing farm-fresh produce for low-income consumers by equipping markets with wireless Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT terminals. Overall, *From the Roots* aimed to increase residents' utilization of farmers' markets and increase farmer revenues at markets in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick as a way to increase healthy food consumption for residents and improve the viability of local markets.

At the outset of the funding period, the DPHO worked to develop a network of markets in the target neighborhoods to serve as the planning group for marketing strategies and to strengthen the resources available to each individual market. Beginning in January 2009, the DPHO met with market operators in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick to discuss the campaign and to confirm markets' participation. Due to changes in market operators in 2008 for the two Bushwick markets, the Brooklyn DPHO also met with local community-based organizations to identify an appropriate organization to manage and grow the markets as part of this initiative. The availability of funds through the Farmers Market Promotion Program proved vital to securing new partners for these markets. At this time, the DPHO also met with an organization in Bedford Stuyvesant seeking to open a new market that summer. By March 2009, the DPHO secured commitment agreements from each of the five market operator organizations and convened the first *From the Roots* network meeting. Network meetings were held approximately monthly throughout the farmers market season to share ideas and contacts for farmer recruitment, plan the promotional campaign and outreach strategies, and share best practices for market operation and development.

Beginning in March 2009, the newly formed *From the Roots* network coordinated efforts to recruit more New York State and regional farmers to participate in the target markets. Over the past several years, existing markets in North and Central Brooklyn have had difficulties securing reliable vendors due to farmers' beliefs about the low profit margin at markets in low-income neighborhoods, limited customer traffic, and the long travel times and fuel costs needed to reach Central Brooklyn. Unfortunately, customers responded to the lack of variety and selection available at local markets by using their money elsewhere and by frequently speaking out *against* local farmers' markets in community meetings. Four of the five *From the Roots* members operated Saturday markets and all committed to recruit farmers to participate in their own and sister network markets. As a result of these efforts, each of the four returning markets saw a three-fold increase in the number of vendors, from 4 in 2008 to 12 in 2009. The fifth market also benefited from joint recruitment and had a total of 3 vendors during its first season. Results from customer surveys conducted in October and November at the five markets pointed to high levels of satisfaction with the selection and quality of food at the markets. Of approximately 100 customers surveyed, 67% rated the selection of produce at the markets as good or excellent and 87% rated the quality of the produce as good or excellent.

The third objective of *From the Roots* was to increase residents' awareness of local farmers' markets and increase their interest in shopping at local markets through a community mobilization and market outreach campaign. Several funded activities were developed as part of this strategy. First, each of the four initially-selected markets was funded to hire a market outreach coordinator and manager. In addition to overall market and EBT sales management on the market day, the coordinator was charged with conducting in-person outreach to local community boards, block associations, WIC offices, senior centers, schools, and other community organizations to talk about the market, provide short nutrition workshops centered on fresh farm produce, and distribute flyers and information to encourage residents to visit the local farmers' market. The fifth network market was also funded to organize senior and school tours and food demos. As a result of community outreach efforts, the markets succeeded in developing new partnerships, raised awareness through flyer distribution and presentations, and hosted hundreds of new shoppers through organized market tours. Each market was also funded to host a minimum of three community outreach events, which included June/July opening festivals, Harvest Festivals in September, and Halloween and Thanksgiving festivals in October and November. These events succeeded in attracting shoppers to the markets with music performances, food tastings, free giveaways, and other family-friendly activities.

Another aspect of the community outreach strategy focused on developing a community media campaign to advertise local markets. Beginning in the spring, *From the Roots* network members worked together to develop a logo, design postcards and flyer materials, and identify local newspapers for ad placement. Using ideas generated through the group, the DPHO coordinated with in-house graphic designers and printers to develop flyers in English and Spanish, outdoor banners in English and Spanish for each market, and three large color postcards listing produce in season for July, late-August/September, and October. The DPHO and market operators developed a mailing list of approximately 2000 local block associations, community organizations, resident leaders, and businesses and sent out three series of the postcards at the start of the season, in August, and again in late-September. In the summer, five ads along with a monthly market listing were placed in community newspapers and a citywide Spanish-language newspaper.

The fourth objective of *From the Roots* was to increase the convenience of shopping at farmers' markets in low-income communities by expanding payment options to include SNAP EBT. Although an estimated one-third of residents in North and Central Brooklyn receive public income assistance including SNAP,³ only one of the four existing markets was equipped with an EBT terminal as of 2008. This market was actually loaned the machine by another organization with a separate account, creating extensive delays in the market's ability to process EBT sales and reimburse farmers. In addition to missing out on SNAP customers, these markets were also missing out on additional revenue from the Health Bucks program, a New York City Department of Health-funded program that provides coupon incentives for shoppers using their EBT card at farmers' markets in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Harlem.

Through the *From the Roots* project, the DPHO linked the five markets to the New York State Farmers' Market Wireless EBT Program, which provided free wireless terminals, reimbursed monthly processing fees, and provided training to market operators on EBT

management. The DPHO served as a liaison with the state program until each market received their terminal and was able to begin processing payments. Overall, farmers selling at the markets had very positive feedback about the addition of EBT sales. Eight of the total 15 vendors selling at the five markets were surveyed in October and November 2009 regarding EBT sales. Of these 8, seven stated that the EBT payment capability helped to increase their sales somewhat or a lot. Of the approximately 100 shoppers surveyed at the markets as part of program evaluation, 44% were receiving SNAP benefits; of those, more than half (58%) had used SNAP EBT at *From the Roots* markets in 2009.

- **Specific contributions of project partners**

The *From the Roots - Brooklyn Farmers' Marketing Network* was comprised of the following core partners: 1) New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Brooklyn District Public Health Office (Brooklyn DPHO), Physical Activity and Nutrition Programs; 2) Make the Road New York, market operators for the Maria Hernandez Farmers' Market in Bushwick; 3) EcoStation, market operators for the Bushwick Farmers' Market in Bushwick; 4) Brooklyn Rescue Mission, market operators for the Malcolm X Boulevard Farmers' Market in Bedford Stuyvesant; 5) Brownsville Multi-Service Family Health Center, market operators for the Brownsville Farmers' Market in Brownsville; and 6) Hattie Carthan Community Garden, market operators for the Hattie Carthan Community Market in Bedford Stuyvesant, which joined the network after the start of the grant period and benefited from the joint marketing and outreach efforts. The New York State Farmers Market Federation Wireless EBT program also proved to be a vital partner by outfitting each participating market with the wireless terminal and training resources to process SNAP payments.

The Brooklyn DPHO served as the administrative and grant manager; convened network meetings; and liaised with graphic designers, printers, local newspaper and media outlets, and other vendors to develop the marketing materials. The Brooklyn DPHO also developed evaluation surveys and materials, entered and analyzed shopper data, and collected other evaluation measures where available. Each of the five participating markets worked with the DPHO to identify neighborhood champions who were hired to conduct community presentations, manage EBT sales on market days, manage market bookkeeping, and develop promotional events and other outreach efforts. Each market contributed their experience in community organizing around fresh food access in low-income neighborhoods to help shape the marketing efforts and assisted each other with vendor recruitment through joint outreach to farmers. Market operators like EcoStation shared their creative ideas for community events with the other markets and helped network markets set up bicycle blenders to attract customers to buy fruit smoothies as added value items. Make the Road staff connected the Network to an in-kind graphic designer who developed the *From the Roots* logo. All the markets posted information about sister markets as part of their flyer outreach at community sites. Additionally, at the end of the season, the markets shared lessons learned and ideas for the 2010 season with their partner organizations.

- **Results, conclusions, and lessons learned**

Overall, the program activities and objectives (outlined above) funded through *From the Roots* aimed to increase residents' utilization of farmers' markets and increase farmer revenues at markets in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick as a way to increase healthy food consumption for residents and improve the viability of local markets. By developing a network of local markets, *From the Roots* succeeded in boosting farmer and vendor recruitment and expanding the markets to a size that was attractive to customers. In years past, customers' dissatisfaction with the limited selection and quantity of food available at local farmers' markets was a source of constant, negative publicity for the markets. As customer surveys in 2009 pointed out, more than half of shoppers learned about the market by passing by or through word of mouth, pointing to the need to boost produce selection as a starting point for farmers' market promotion in this area.

The promotional activities developed under *From the Roots* including the postcard mailing, newspaper advertisements, and flyer distribution provided much needed resources to the market operator organizations, many of whom lacked the funds or staffing to develop marketing efforts on their own and who had struggled in previous years to improve the visibility of their markets. Each market was also funded to conduct community presentations and on-site market promotional events as a way to boost the visibility of the markets and mobilize residents to support markets as an important community health resource. Based on shopper surveys, the majority of shoppers reported learning about the market by passing by or by hearing about it through word of mouth; only about 10% of shoppers said that they found out about the market and/or learned about the SNAP EBT payment capability from *From the Roots* flyers and promotional materials. Based on feedback from market operators and from farmer vendors, market events and nearby community presentations did prove successful in raising the visibility of the market and drawing in shoppers. These findings raise important questions as to how resources could best be used in the future to continue to raise awareness about markets and increase the number of residents' utilizing them. In the future, it is likely that farmers' market promotion efforts in North and Central Brooklyn would benefit from additional resources to expand marketing efforts to television, neighborhood billboards, radio advertisements, and more wide-reaching media outlets while at the same time recognizing the importance of working to mobilize community members through local presentations and on-site events.

Efforts to expand the range of payment options at target markets to include SNAP EBT proved to be very successful in increasing farmer revenues, customer convenience, and produce purchases. The connection to the state Wireless EBT program, along with the technical assistance and promotion efforts provided under the grant helped to kickstart these markets to accept EBT for the first time in four of the five markets. By the end of the 2009 market season, at least two of the markets (in Bushwick) reported average weekly EBT sales of \$100-\$200, a figure that was much higher than expected for new EBT markets in this area. The work conducted under *From the Roots* laid a solid foundation for expansion of EBT and overall sales revenue that has continued through the 2010 season; in the Bushwick markets alone, average EBT sales have grown to more than \$500 per week.

While many of the *From the Roots* activities proved to be successful in expanding sales at the target markets and achieving the project goals, one area that the DPHO did face significant challenges was in developing and creating cohesion in the Network itself. Prior to the funding period, DPHO staff had worked extensively with each of the market operator organizations and had developed a high level of trust and collaboration with staff of those organizations. The DPHO found, however, that this same level of trust and openness did not fully extend to within the Network itself, as many organizations and individuals were working together for the first time. In low-income communities, where resource needs far outpace the funding opportunities available, community organizations are often forced to work in competition with one another. Despite documented inefficiencies from this competitive approach, it often serves as a backdrop for groups' interactions and is only overcome by a long-range commitment from each organization to work together openly. The Network faced some real challenges at the outset in getting individual organizations to commit to sharing ideas and seeing the value in collaborative efforts with each other beyond the activities prescribed by the grant. It would likely take a few years of working together for individual organizations to realize the full value of sharing their insights, relationships, and creativity to support the growth of each other's markets. Based on these lessons learned from the past year, the DPHO will explore ways to support network formation over the longer term in the future.

- **Current or future benefits to be derived from the project**

The *From the Roots* project made significant strides in boosting the capacity of markets in low-income neighborhoods in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick to attract more farmers and attract more customers through community marketing and addition of EBT payment options. The project laid an important foundation for market operator organizations to increase awareness about markets and make farmers' markets an asset for community health in high-need areas. In 2010, each of the target markets has continued to operate, to expand its produce and vendor selections, and expand EBT sales in partnership with community and Health Department efforts. The market operator organization in Bushwick worked to develop an urban garden to grow food for the market and to open an additional market to serve the Bushwick community. The Hattie Carthan market in Bedford Stuyvesant responded to customer survey feedback and increased its selections by adding fresh eggs from its own urban garden to the mix of vendor options. Each market continues to work with the DPHO and other community partners to raise awareness about local farmers' markets and their importance to the communities they serve.

- **Additional information available (publications, websites)**

Please see appendix for photographs and examples of marketing materials developed as part of this initiative.

- **Recommendations for future research needed, if applicable**

Farmers' market promotion efforts in New York City and across the United States would benefit from more research on what forms of marketing – such as television, radio, word of mouth, internet social networking – are most effective in getting consumers to visit and frequent

local farmers' markets. Market operators, state agricultural agencies, and public health officials would also benefit from more published literature on the lessons learned from successful markets in low-income urban neighborhoods. In preparation for this project, the DPHO found little literature providing case studies of successful – or unsuccessful – farmers' market projects in low-income areas outside of reports on state Farmers' Market Nutrition Program activities. A study that pulled together lessons learned and best practices for farmers' market promotion from a variety of community settings would be useful to the many organizations and public health agencies putting resources into farmers' market development.

- **Contact person for the project with telephone number and email address**

Kimberly Bylander, Coordinator of Physical Activity and Nutrition Programs
Brooklyn District Public Health Office, NYC DOHMH
(646) 253-5728
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- **Description of the people, organizations, marketing entities, and/or communities that have benefited from the project's accomplishments**

Numerous organizations and stakeholders benefited from the activities conducted under the *From the Roots* project. This grant provided needed funds to help the market operator organizations – Make the Road New York, EcoStation, Brooklyn Rescue Mission, Brownsville Multi-Service Family Health Center, and Hattie Carthan Community Garden – invest in market development, marketing, and farmer recruitment and expand their markets for the first time beyond the one-farmer, produce stand model. The expanded produce and food selections, community events, and greater convenience offered by expanded payment options directly benefited the thousands of residents in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick who were able to utilize the markets as a place to get high-quality, healthy food at affordable prices. In these neighborhoods, where residents have limited access to full-service supermarkets and other stores selling fresh produce, the addition of healthy food outlets is critical to both improving food access and changing community norms around healthy eating. The community outreach work, events, and cooking demos funded by this grant and conducted by each market helped to further raise awareness about the importance of healthy eating and to get residents' to view farmers' markets as a community asset that benefits health, neighborhood development, and local economies. The enthusiasm that staff encountered from customers during the survey assessment showed how much residents' perceptions about these local markets had improved over recent years, pointing to the positive impact of the *From the Roots* project.

From the Roots also specifically benefited low-income, public benefit users in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Bushwick by expanding payment options at the markets to include SNAP EBT. Enabling residents to use their benefits at local markets for farm fresh produce brought an added convenience to those on limited incomes who were interested in buying healthier food. The addition of wireless EBT terminals also enabled shoppers to take advantage of the Health Bucks program, a program jointly funded by the New York City Health

Department and Human Resources Administration that provides a coupon incentive for those shopping with their EBT card at markets in low-income areas. The Health Bucks SNAP promotion had worked successfully for the past few years in neighboring Brooklyn communities like East New York and Fort Greene and was welcomed by shoppers in the target neighborhoods.

Lastly, *From the Roots* greatly benefited the farmers and other vendors who participated in the target markets in 2009 and for years to come. Of the 8 vendors surveyed at the end of the season, all stated that the market operator had been successful in bringing more shoppers to the market through street outreach, cooking demos, and other events. All eight stated that they would be interested in selling at the market again in 2010. Overall, by growing local farmers' markets from both the supply and demand side, *From the Roots* left tangible – hopefully lasting – benefits for market operators, residents, farmers, and other community stakeholders alike, which laid a strong foundation for farmers' market promotion and community nutrition efforts in years to come.

¹ Olson EC, Van Wye G, Kerker B, Thorpe L, Frieden TR. Take Care Central Brooklyn; Take Care Bushwick/Williamsburg, NYC Community Health Profiles, Second Edition; 2006.

² Graham R, Kaufman L, Novoa Z, Karpati A. Eating in, eating out, eating well: Access to healthy food in North and Central Brooklyn. New York, N.Y.: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2006.

³ Community District Profile. NYC Department of City Planning (Dec. 2002) (filenames: profile_Bed_stuy, profile_bushwick, profile_brownsville).

Appendix:
 From the Roots: Newspaper Ads (examples from July ads)

¡Es Temporada de Mercado de Agricultores!

 Visite estos mercados en su vecindario 

El Mercado de Agricultores de Bushwick
 Linden St y Broadway
 Miércoles 10am—6pm
 LLame al 502-494-0628 para mas información

El Mercado de Agricultores en el Parque Maria Hernández
 Knickerbocker Ave y Starr St
 Sábados 9am—3pm
 LLame al 718-418-7690 x 232 para mas información

Aceptamos cheques de mercados "FMNP"; tarjetas de EBT/cupones de alimentos; Health Bucks; y dinero en efectivo

 **¡Mercados de Agricultores Comunitarios: ¡Frescos, Económicos y Deliciosos!**

It's Farmers' Market Season!

 **What's in Season in July** 

Beans	Broccoli
Peaches	Lettuces
Carrots	Collard Greens

Check out the farmers' markets in your neighborhood

Brownsville Community Farmers' Market
 (next to BMS Health Center)
 592 Rockaway Ave
 bet. Blake & Dumont Aves
 Saturdays 8:30am-3pm
 July 11-November 14, 2009

We Accept: WIC/Senior Farmers' Market Coupons, Food Stamp EBT cards, Health Bucks, and Cash for great food at great prices!

Shop with your Food Stamp EBT card to get Health Bucks coupons for free, farm-fresh fruits and vegetables.

Contact BMS at 718-345-6366
 For more information

 **Community Farmers' Markets: Fresh, Affordable, Delicious!** 

It's Farmers' Market Season!

  **What's in Season in July**  

Beans	Broccoli	Peaches
Lettuces	Carrots	Collard Greens

More places to shop in Bed Stuy for great local produce in season!!!

Malcolm X Blvd. Cmty Farmers Market Malcolm X, bet. Marion & Chauncey (Near Jackie Robinson Park) Saturdays 8am-1pm July 11-November 7, 2009	Hattie Carthan Community Market Marcy Ave & Clifton Place (next to Hattie Carthan Community Garden) Saturdays 8am-3pm July 11-November 7, 2009
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Sponsored by Brooklyn Rescue Mission/
 Bed-Stuy Farm

Contact 718 363-3085 for more information Contact 718 638-3566 for more information

We Accept: WIC/Senior Farmers' Market Coupons, Food Stamp EBT cards, Health Bucks, and Cash for great food at great prices!

Shop with your Food Stamp EBT card to get Health Bucks coupons for free, farm-fresh fruits and vegetables.

 

From the Roots: Postcard mailing (postcards 1 and 2)



What's in Season in July
Beans
Broccoli
Peaches
Carrots
Lettuces
Collard Greens

It's Farmers' Market Season!
Community Farmers' Markets – Fresh, Affordable, Delicious!

NYC Health
GOOD HEALTH STARTS WITH GOOD CHOICES!



What's in Season in August
Beans
Corn
Tomatoes
Melons
Peppers
Cantaloupe
Zucchini

It's Farmers' Market Season!
Community Farmers' Markets – Fresh, Affordable, Delicious!

NYC Health
GOOD HEALTH STARTS WITH GOOD CHOICES!



From the Roots: Market Photographs



Hattie Carthan Garden Community Market,
Bedford Stuyvesant



Malcolm X Farmers Market,
Bedford Stuyvesant



Bike Smoothie Blender at Market, Bushwick