

Providing Access to Healthy Locally-Grown Food for All New Yorkers (New EBT Project)

Council on the Environment of New York City received \$100,000 to expand EBT usage to six New York City Greenmarkets; revitalize the Wholesale Farmers Market by increasing the diversity of products; and promoted the benefits of local food to customers in underserved communities.

[Final Report FY09](#)

Progress Report – FINAL REPORT

October 2009 – October 2011

Recipient Name: Council on the Environment of NYC, DBA GrowNYC

Project Title: Providing Healthy Locally-Grown Food for All New Yorkers (New EBT Project)

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GrowNYC is grateful for the support of the USDA-AMS Farmers Market Promotion Program. This report summarizes the actions and results that took place between October 2009 – October 2011 to meet the Scope of Services outlined in the USDA's agreement with Council on the Environment of New York City (GrowNYC).

A. Project Summary

The goals of this project were to improve the health and wellness of communities facing disproportionate rates of diet-related illness by enhancing the access and affordability of fresh, locally-produced foods through two methods: the replication of Greenmarket's successful EBT program at six new markets and the implementation of a much-needed wholesale distribution system targeted to bodegas and other institutions serving underserved communities. The efforts supported mid-size growers in our region, ensuring that farmland remains in production – a key component of Greenmarket's mission.

To expand its EBT project to six additional Greenmarkets, GrowNYC identified markets, hired and trained staff, and launched a publicity campaign comprised of multi-lingual advertising and community outreach.

The bulk of the FMPP grant was centered on GrowNYC's proposal to assume operations of the Wholesale Farmers Market in the Bronx, NY, and to expand the market to play a central role as a supplier in New York City's local food system. GrowNYC outlined the following strategy to achieve this: create a management structure including recruiting full-time staff for the market; promote the market through various methods including postcards and flyers, in-person relationships with food outlets and institutions, conferences, and the GrowNYC website; recruit buyers, in part through a new Fresh Bodegas program incentivizing corner stores to stock healthy, local produce; recruit farmers, primarily through one-on-one relationship building; and secure long-term sustainability for the Wholesale market through identification of a permanent, indoor space, and a self-sufficient financial model.

B. Project Approach

Greenmarket has a standard operating procedure to implement EBT at market, which we followed for the EBT component of the grant. Using demographic data and information on food stamp recipients, staff identified several existing and several new markets for implementation of EBT. EBT market managers were hired, trained, and placed, and conducted outreach and promotions to attract food stamp recipients in the community. They also operated the wireless terminals and provided customer service at market.

GrowNYC adopted management of the Wholesale Farmers Market in 2009, renaming it Wholesale Greenmarket. Once Wholesale Greenmarket staff were hired, they worked to increase both the number of farmers attending market and the number of customers sourcing wholesale quantities of local produce from

participating farms. To meet these goals, market staff conducted ongoing outreach to both groups through various methods of recruitment, including advertising, direct outreach, as well as by organizing and attending workshops and conferences. Market staff worked with farmers on-site to promote sales, increase market efficiency, and facilitate the movement of produce between farmers and customers.

At the same time, GrowNYC hired a team of consultants to assist with various aspects of creating a permanent facility for the Wholesale Greenmarket to replace the parking lot where the market takes place today – a space that lacks storage, lights, and heat. The new facility would include parking, 44,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor space, and cold storage. Consultants assisted with identifying potential locations, designing a business plan, and drawing schematics for the indoor space. GrowNYC staff also identified and presented the project to potential funding sources. Due to the high costs and difficulties in securing a funder, GrowNYC has recently embarked on another opportunity to partner with City Harvest, the food rescue organization, to use their Long Island City warehouse as a distribution point for GrowNYC Youthmarkets, bodegas and other food retail outlets that our staff have recruited as customers.

Most importantly, GrowNYC staff spent significant time and effort building its own Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program. In assessing the Wholesale Greenmarket initially, GrowNYC identified lack of distribution as a major challenge in recruiting buyers for the market. Farmers cannot offer delivery, and buyers were often challenged in making their own trip to the Bronx to obtain products. Beginning with the Fresh Bodegas program, which now provides local produce to 11 bodegas, the program also moves produce into eight food retailers in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and multiple additional retailers along these routes. The distribution program is focused on communities in need of healthy eating options and utilizes GrowNYC vehicles as well as trucks operated by Red Jacket Orchards' distribution team. Staff continue to assess and refine the distribution system.

C. Goals and Outcomes Achieved

Goals and outcomes are broken out by FMPP proposal component below.

1. Implementation of EBT at six Greenmarkets

The EBT portion of GrowNYC's grant with FMPP enabled us to expand EBT to 6 additional Greenmarkets in 2010. Greenmarket staff identified six additional markets, listed below, to offer EBT. The Greenmarket EBT Project Manager, in conjunction with the Office Manager, interviewed, hired, and trained 4 EBT coordinators to manage the EBT program at the 6 new EBT markets. These EBT Coordinators were paid via FMPP funding from July through November 2010.

Greenmarket EBT staff developed relationships with community groups such as tenants associations, service providers (WIC offices) and other relevant individuals and organizations (places of worship, key community stakeholders) to promote EBT use at the identified markets. In addition to community outreach, in June 2010 Greenmarket launched a multi-platform, multi-lingual advertising campaign using New York City subways, busses, billboards and newspapers to inform the public which Greenmarkets accept EBT.

From July through November 2010, the 6 new EBT markets brought in EBT sales totaling \$34,186:

- Brooklyn Borough Hall Tues. Greenmarket, Brooklyn – \$4,839
- Brooklyn Borough Hall Thurs. Greenmarket, Brooklyn - \$4,328
- Brooklyn Borough Hall Sat. Greenmarket, Brooklyn - \$3,007
- Fort Washington Greenmarket, Manhattan - \$6,257
- East Elmhurst Greenmarket, Queens - \$10,123
- Greenpoint Greenmarket, Brooklyn - \$5,632

This \$34,186 total represents additional income to our farmers and as well as food stamp dollars that were spent on fresh, healthy products for families. All six of these Greenmarkets continued to accept EBT in 2011. Between January 1 and November 30, 2011, sales at the markets increased to \$40,444.

2. Strengthening the Wholesale Greenmarket

Recruiting farmers and increasing diversity of products

Growth of the Wholesale Greenmarket depends on increased farmer participation and increased diversity of available products. During the course of the grant, GrowNYC strengthened existing relationships with participating farmers and promoted the market to those farmers who have not been involved in the past. Though the number of farmers remained stable during the 2010 and 2011 seasons, product diversity offered at Market doubled during the grant cycle, from 25 varieties offered during the 2010 season to 50 during the 2011 season. This tremendous increase is a direct result of the expanded customer base recruited and retained by GrowNYC staff, which increased the demand for new products.

Wholesale staff took multiple approaches in recruiting new farmers for the market. Staff attended and presented at various workshops and conferences promoting the market in general, as well as connecting directly with farmers who showed interest in Wholesale Greenmarket. Presentations at a marketing workshop organized by Cornell Cooperative Extension's office in Hamden, NY as well as at the Young Farmers Conference at Stone Barns in 2010 allowed staff to engage new vegetable and livestock farmers.

Staff also visited regional farms throughout the grant cycle to learn more about wholesale packing and quality-control best practices and to recruit new farmers to Market. Although these visits did not directly translate to increased participation at Market, relationships built and strengthened through visits may lead to increased participation in future seasons.

When existing Wholesale Greenmarket farmers could not fill customer orders, staff reached out to retail Greenmarket vendors and other regional farmers. This creative solution resulted in satisfied customers and built trust in the market and its management, which is essential to future growth and the recruitment of new customers.

Attention was also focused on existing Wholesale Greenmarket farmers. Staff attended a one-day GAP certification course at the Cornell Cooperative Extension office in Ulster County, NY, which provided an important opportunity to learn about trends and requirements regarding food safety, improving staff's ability to be a resource for farmers.

Promoting the market to buyers, particularly in underserved communities

Attracting new buyers to the Wholesale Greenmarket is critical to the long-term success and viability of the Market. During GrowNYC's grant period, staff has been extremely successful in building the customer base, particularly through building its own distribution network: the Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program, launched in summer 2011. The program is testing a variety of models for distribution, based on specific program needs. The Fresh Bodegas Initiative contracts with Red Jacket Orchards to pick up and deliver local produce to 11 bodegas and several additional retailers along the route. Using GrowNYC vehicles and drivers, the Pilot Distribution program moves produce into eight food retailers in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Finally, GrowNYC vehicles transport wholesale produce to 13 Youthmarkets throughout the five boroughs and to Washington Heights to operate the YUM Food Box program, a low-income CSA for seniors. By offering distribution, particularly to larger retail outlets, GrowNYC is able to remove a major barrier for stores to purchase fresh, local produce. Building on existing routes ensures efficiency and is an important step towards financial sustainability.

During the 2011 season, the Market has experienced an impressive increase in both the number of customers and visitors, a trend documented by the site manager. During fall of 2010, the average number of customers at Market ranged from 15-20 on any given day. During the 2011 season, the Market has seen a daily average of 40-50 customers – approximately three times more than the previous year -- as well as 50-60 additional visitors.

A Wholesale Success workshop, organized by GrowNYC staff in February 2011, addressed successful wholesaling techniques, food safety issues, and gave more than 60 farmers in attendance an opportunity to meet eight significant produce buyers from the region. A number of lasting relationships were formed during the workshop, and feedback from both farmers and buyers in attendance was overwhelmingly positive.

Developing strategic partnerships for sourcing and distribution

Along with the Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program, explained above, the most significant achievement in strategic partnerships is a pending agreement with City Harvest to use their cold storage warehouse in Long Island City, Queens, as an indoor distribution hub for wholesale produce. As GrowNYC staff continue to explore funding sources for a permanent Wholesale Greenmarket facility, the City Harvest warehouse will provide an essential aggregation point, simplifying transportation and enabling longer storage of products.

Wholesale Greenmarket staff forged important connections with local emergency food providers, including the Food Bank of New York City, the Fountain House, Westside Campaign Against Hunger and others. One of the largest food pantries in the city, Yorkville Common Pantry, has sourced over \$150,000 worth of local produce from affiliated farmers. GrowNYC staff will continue to build these relationships so that emergency food providers will become key purchasers of produce from local farmers.

GrowNYC staff visited wholesale facilities in Philadelphia and Toronto to research best practices. Three potential funders and two city government officials attended the Toronto trip to learn about the possibilities for New York City's wholesale market, which will translate to an understanding of the need to commit resources to the project. Staff also visited an upstate New York co-packer in Kingston that focuses on extending the local season through processing. Plans for the future growth of the Market will take into account the successes and challenges gleaned from these site visits.

Market staff has partnered with the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to get local produce into New York City Schools for healthy fundraisers and special events. During the 2011 season, WGM provided over \$3,000 worth of produce to over 20 schools.

D. Beneficiaries

Our target audience includes populations living in areas that lack access to healthy, fresh, affordable food. Additionally, our program focuses on helping small- to medium-sized family farms in the region by providing markets and customers.

Improved access:

FMPP allowed GrowNYC to accept EBT at an additional six markets during the 2010 season. As a direct result, more than \$34,000 in federal benefits was spent on nutritious, local produce in communities that need it most.

Produce sourced at Wholesale Greenmarket found its way into high-need neighborhoods through a number of GrowNYC programs and other organizations during the 2011 season.

GrowNYC operates multiple programs focused on providing access to healthy food in neighborhoods across New York City. YUM Food Box is a low-income CSA in Washington Heights for seniors that relies on wholesale produce to keep the costs low. GrowNYC also runs 13 Youthmarkets, which are youth-operated farmstands in neighborhoods without a traditional farmers market. In 2011 GrowNYC launched the Brownsville Partnership, a joint project with Common Ground, a community-based organization in Brownsville, Brooklyn. GrowNYC's component of the project is increasing food access in the neighborhood, which has been focused both on a two Youthmarkets in the neighborhood as well as eight retailers that now carry local produce. Through the new Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program, these programs were able to easily distribute wholesale produce to in-need communities in Northern Manhattan and Brooklyn.

The Fresh Bodega Initiative, a GrowNYC project in partnership with Red Jacket Orchards and the Strategic Alliance for Health, works with 11 bodegas in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and East Harlem. The initiative provides delivery of fresh produce, branded refrigerators, and allows bodegas to initially sell items on consignment, incentivizing participation. Areas targeted by the Fresh Bodegas Initiative lack consistent and affordable access to fresh, healthy produce. The Initiative distributed an average of 200 pounds of fresh produce and juice each Friday during the 2011 season.

Building off of the Fresh Bodegas route and continuing the partnership with Red Jacket Orchards as the distributor, staff recruited nearby stores to purchase regional produce as part of the Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program. Weekly deliveries began in mid-August with a total of eight additional stores joining in. By the end of the 2011 season, the program had distributed over \$20,000 worth of local produce sourced from participating WGM farmers.

Emergency Food Providers continued to use Wholesale Greenmarket as a source for their programs, including food pantries and soup kitchens. Yorkville Common Pantry, which sourced over \$150,000 worth of local produce from Wholesale Greenmarket from August 2010 to September 2011, cited produce quality and affordability as the two main reasons that they participated. They also said that participants in their programs were excited to have access to the same local produce that can be found at farmers markets throughout the city.

Wholesale Greenmarket staff has continued work with the New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene in an effort to get more fresh produce into schools in high-need areas through fundraisers held throughout the city. In October and November 2011, Wholesale Greenmarket delivered over \$2,000 worth of produce to 20 schools, most of them Title 1/high-need schools, for school events and fundraisers. All of the fundraisers took place on school property and were open to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Increased farm viability:

By accepting EBT at six markets during the 2010 season, customers spent an additional \$34,000 in federal benefits on nutritious, local produce, directly supporting small family farms.

Wholesale Greenmarket farmers accounted for over 1,200 acres of farmland in production in New York and New Jersey, with a median size of 100 acres per farm. Wholesale Greenmarket was but one of the many outlets for these farms, with others including wholesale houses, terminal markets, and on-farm stores. Wholesale Greenmarket provided these participating farms with the opportunity to sell wholesale directly to customers, allowing them to maintain control of their product and retain greater profits. Participating farmers cited the Market as an essential part of their business plans.

Customers of the Market have become spokespeople for the benefits of the market, telling staff that buying from the farmers at Wholesale Greenmarket is a "priority during the growing season" and that produce purchased from the Market is "much better than the produce sourced through other distributors."

E. Lessons Learned

The 2010 and 2011 seasons offered a number of lessons for both GrowNYC and participating farmers at Wholesale Greenmarket.

Wholesale staff learned the importance of knowing the types of businesses presently shopping at the Wholesale Greenmarket and focusing outreach strategies on obtaining similar customers. This is the tactic that staff used in summer 2011 in building the Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program when approaching bodegas and produce markets in the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. By utilizing the existing Fresh Bodegas route that ran through the neighborhood on Friday mornings, Wholesale Greenmarket obtained new customers. Capitalizing on these existing distribution networks is a sensible approach to expanding the customer base for the market.

Existing Wholesale Greenmarket farmers were challenged in providing for the buyers that toured the market at the start of the 2011 season. Fluctuating availability and lack of consistent packaging and grading were some of the primary challenges. During the season, Wholesale staff have learned to focus energy on recruiting types of farms that are currently not represented at Market, such as farmers that package and grade their product according to wholesale standards. Some participating farmers in Wholesale Greenmarket have expressed apprehension in investing in additional equipment for packaging, grading and washing with no guaranteed return in profit.

The Wholesale Greenmarket Pilot Distribution Program continues to teach important lessons regarding financial and staffing needs. For example, staff who are well-versed in distribution systems and who understand sales are best suited to recruit new buyers and work with retail outlets. GrowNYC will continue to evaluate and refine this program moving forward based on lessons learned.

F. Additional Information

Red Jacket Orchards has been a key partner in distribution of wholesale produce to bodegas and retailers in Brooklyn since the beginning of the Fresh Bodegas Initiative in spring 2011. The Fresh Bodegas Initiative is described here, and the website includes a video focused on Red Jacket Orchards:

<http://www.grownyc.org/freshbodegas>

Youthmarket is a GrowNYC program that partners with local community groups to hire teens to operate farmstands in neighborhoods where demand is building for a traditional retail farmers market. Youthmarket is a key purchaser of wholesale produce, and details on the program are found here:

<http://www.grownyc.org/youthmarket>

The website for the Wholesale Greenmarket, which includes information on product availability and farmers is found here: <http://www.grownyc.org/wholesale>

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