

The **South Wedge Planning Committee, Inc.** of Rochester, NY received \$8,854 to develop a marketing plan and materials; implement an EBT incentive program to expand use of EBT; and improve the eating habits of customers of the South Wedge Farmers Market.

[Final Report FY 10](#)

# 2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

**Date:** February 13, 2013

**Recipient Name:** South Wedge Planning Committee, Inc.

**Title of Project:** South Wedge Farmers Market Community Health and Farmer Sustainability Initiative

**Grant Number:** 12-25-G-1177

**Location:** Rochester, New York

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## **Project Summary**

The South Wedge neighborhood, like many inner-city areas nationwide, is a food desert, with low-income residents bearing the brunt of this situation. The South Wedge Farmers Market (SWFM) was opened in 2007 to bring fresh, locally-grown organic produce to the neighborhood. Attendance at the market was fair, but many moderate- and low-income households found it too expensive. As a result, participating farmers did not do the volume of business needed to make participating in the SWFM worthwhile. Therefore, the over-arching goal of this project was to increase overall market attendance, including attendance by households using EBT (food stamp benefits). In addition to enabling the market and its participating farmers to become financially sustainable, increased use by lower-income households should lead to improvements in overall community health. EBT bonus and shuttle bus programs were initiated. Local farmers who used sustainable practices were recruited to supplement those who grew only certified organic produce, resulting in a broader array of affordable products. We also increased marketing and promotion efforts, using traditional and digital media. Over the two year period of the FMPP grant, we spent less than \$8,000 to implement these changes.

Among the outcomes were an increase in the number of EBT users (baseline of 10-20 households, to 61 in 2011 and 166 in 2012), and an increase in EBT sales (\$2,722 in 2011, \$3,003 in 2012). 96% of the farmers from 2011 returned for the 2012 season and those farmers reported increases in total sales of 10% - 25% over the two years. A survey of market-goers at the end of the season showed that 25% reported being first time shoppers at the market.

## **Project Approach**

### General Goals & Objectives

- Improve access to healthy foods by residents of the South Wedge and enable participating farmers to become financially sustainable
  - Increase overall weekly market attendance
  - Increase the number of EBT users at the SWFM
- Improve community health by fostering healthier eating habits
- Enable the market to become financially sustainable
  - Recruit sponsors to underwrite SWFM operations

### Strategies Used to Achieve Goals

- To increase weekly market attendance:
  - Use a broad-based advertising strategy
  - Implement a transportation strategy to reach seniors and people with disabilities who live in subsidized high-rise apartment buildings in the neighborhood
- To increase the number of EBT users at the market:
  - Develop an incentive for EBT users to purchase food at SWFM
- To foster healthier eating habits:
  - Ensure there are affordable and culturally appropriate products available
  - Implement a children's program
  - Develop a means to interest market-goers in available produce
- To recruit sponsors:
  - Develop a "sales pitch" and incentives for potential sponsors

### Activities in Support of Strategies

- Printed feature articles in each issue of The Wedge Newspaper (5 per season).
- Developed a SWFM website and Facebook page. The website was linked to the main organization's website.
- Distributed professionally designed posters to neighborhood businesses before the start of each season. Other printed material (door hangers, postcards, lawn signs) also distributed to the neighborhood.
- In 2011, implemented wheelchair-accessible transportation for residents of three area low-income high rises.
- Recruited vendors who were sustainable and affordable, but not necessarily "certified organic".
- Developed a matching token program for EBT users. In 2011, \$10 in tokens were given to match the first \$10 in EBT benefits used on a person's first time at the market. On a second visit, a \$5 match was provided. In 2012, the match was \$5.
- Recruited neighborhood volunteers to count market attendance.
- Developed the "Wedge Veg Passport", featuring a vegetable (or fruit) of the week. Each week, children coming to the market got a new page to add to their passport, consisting of a picture to color and other information about the featured item. When done, they took their passport to a farmer for a free sample to eat.
- Cooking demonstrations were held with featured produce.
- Principal sponsor (Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union) given a free booth at the market.

## **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

- A total of 10 feature articles, each with a readership of 7,000+, appeared in The Wedge Newspaper. The EBT program, the "Wedge Veg Passport" program, recipes, seasonal produce and individual vendors were all featured at various times.
- The SWFM Facebook page (linked directly to the SWFM website) had more than 1,600 "likes" by the end of the 2012 season.
- More than 50 SWFM posters were placed in area businesses, 200+ door hangers and/or postcards were distributed to area households, and 50 lawn signs were placed throughout the neighborhood.
- In 2011, 60 EBT users received an average of \$15 in matching tokens each, for a total of \$915 in EBT incentives distributed and total EBT sales of \$2,722. In 2012, 166 EBT users received \$5 in matching tokens, for a total of \$830 in incentives and \$3,003 in EBT sales.
- Children used 25 "Wedge Veg Passports" each week of the season in both years, tasting all manner of fruits and vegetables (with the possible exception of onions, turnips and brussels sprouts).
- "Strawberry Shortcake Days" were the most popular cooking events held, with well over 100 servings distributed in one hour.
- Participating farmers reported a 10% - 25% increase in sales; 96% said they were returning for the following season.
- 25% of shoppers surveyed reported that they were new to the market.
- Two sponsors were recruited for the 2012 market season. Between them, the sponsors contributed \$5,000 towards market operating expenses.

## **Beneficiaries.**

Beneficiaries of this project included:

- Lower-income neighbors (both EBT users and non-EBT customers), who were able to access fresh, locally grown produce at affordable prices;
- Farmers, who reported a 10% - 25% increase in sales by the end of the 2012 season; and
- Neighborhood children (attending the market with their families) who learned where food comes from, and were able to sample a wide range of fruits and vegetables.

## **Lessons Learned.**

Strategies that worked well during the project:

- The EBT matching program worked very well. We went from a baseline of 10 - 20 households using the market to 61 households in 2011 and 166 in 2012.
- Broadening the definition of who could sell at the market also worked well. The initial market policy of "certified organic only" resulted in the prices of products being out of reach for moderate- and low-income shoppers both. As a result, a number of the vendors didn't feel it was worth returning to the market for the 2011 season. When we recruited farmers who used sustainable practices, even if they were not certified organic, prices for fresh produce became more affordable, and actually resulted in significant sales increases for all vendors. 96% of the

vendors stated that they would return for the 2012 season. We also believe the lower prices were a major factor in the increased number of EBT users shopping at the market.

- The "Wedge Veg Passport" was a great draw for families with children. It both promoted healthier eating among the children and taught them that food doesn't come from the grocery store.

#### Strategies that didn't work well

- The transportation program didn't work, despite heavy promotion at the three area high-rise apartments and use of a wheelchair-accessible van. There was heavy use in the first two weeks, but little or no use after that.

#### What were the unforeseen challenges

- Increasing use of the market among lower-income elderly neighbors, with or without disabilities, became a challenge. We thought the transportation program would make it convenient for those seniors to use the market, but that was not the case.
- Recruiting sponsors was a challenge to some degree. The Market Manager was tasked with raising \$10,000 in funding, and was supposed to have assistance from certain members of the Board of Directors. That assistance didn't materialize. Nonetheless, the Manager was able to secure \$5,000 in sponsor funding for the 2012 season.

#### "If I had it to do over I would have..."

- Tried taking the market to the customers when it turned out that bringing customers to the market didn't work. The same van (with a market volunteer), on the same or similar schedule, could have brought a selection of fruits and vegetables to each high-rise and sold them there.

#### **Additional Information:**

Some photographs:

Seniors who used the market van on Opening Day:



Kids participating in the "Wedge Veg Passport" program:



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