

Chillicothe Farmers' Market Outreach

Chillicothe Farmers' Market Association of Chillicothe, OH received \$42,547 to launch a multi-media advertising campaign; implement an EBT, debit, and credit card purchasing system to increase farmers' incomes; and organize a community clinical medical assessment; and have a educational health fair to highlight the importance of incorporating healthy eating habits.

Final Report

CHILICOTHE FARMERS' MARKET OUTREACH

**MAKING MARKETS ACCESSIBLE AND FINANCIALLY BENEFICIAL FOR
VENDORS AND CUSTOMERS IN APPALCHIA WHILE PROVIDING
EDUCATION, HEALTHY EATING IDEAS AND WELLNESS INFORMATION**

FMPP PROJECT FINAL REPORT

OH-148-2008-G-0742

Project History and Summary

Chillicothe Farmers' Market a story of Revitalization

A place to buy and sell food is essential to the survival of a community. In 1803 land was given, by the City, for the construction of a market house in the middle of Paint St. This operation grew so that the location was changed to Market St. in 1805 to relieve congestion. Though some type of Market has existed most of the intervening years, a demand for local and safe food products resurged in the late 1990's. In January 2002 a group of interested citizens met for lunch and decided the timing was right to reorganize Chillicothe Farmers' Market.

Farmers, business operators, government representatives collaborated to develop rules and by-laws. The Chillicothe Gazette raised excitement by reporting every step. In July 2002 the Market opened in a downtown parking lot with 15 members. Each year the success of the Market has grown. With over 50 vendors and a bigger location the growers Market provides the best of local produce, meat, plants and baked goods each Saturday morning between May and October. Our vendors enjoy discussion with buyers and are anxious to bring a product which meets the needs of the public. Enthusiasm, education and social gathering spots are all part of what makes Chillicothe Farmers' Market unique.

Ross County Ohio is located in the beautiful rolling hills of Appalachia. Chillicothe is the largest city and regional shopping center for several surrounding counties. In 2008, our market was the only one in the region. The Association formed a cooperative in 2008 and applied for the FMPP grant to improve access for vendors and customers to our growing market. Publicity and the ability to use a point of service swipe card machine for EBT/credit/debit and to have senior nutrition coupons are a big part of our grant; other goals including education, networking, and community outreach have become staples of how we define ourselves as a market. The specific goals of the grant became our operational plan for two years and encouraged our board and members to reach out to other organizations and assume new responsibility for word-of-mouth advertising.

The challenge of attracting more customers, especially low income and underserved populations was important in 2008 when this grant was written but the ability to use our grant over the 2009 and 2010 market seasons when the economic problems of our region multiplied was extremely beneficial. The unemployment upswing had an interesting effect of creating an opportunity to cultivate new vendors and help them develop small businesses. Over the 2009 and 2010 seasons Chillicothe was able to increase the number of vendors at market and the income to vendors. The number of customers increased including a dramatic increase in those using our EBT machine and new participation in the Senior Nutrition Program.

Reaching The Goals/Evaluating Outcomes

Goal #1: Enhancing access to shopping at the Market, especially for vulnerable populations.

Activities: Purchase for POS machine and contract for service, creating a tent space and system of tokens that would serve as the center of our Market Token program then creating a job description and hiring the EBT coordinator. Signage for the market, signage for the EBT Center, signage for the individual vendors was important. The grant coordinator did the purchasing and then trained the vendors, board and EBT coordinator as the 2009 season began.

Summary: This was the “nuts and bolts” goal and provided the infrastructure and training necessary to get the new token program off to a good start. Initially 10 of our 40 “member vendors” thought they would not participate in the token program. By the end of week three of the 2009 season all members and most daily vendors saw the benefit and participated. One big positive is that our coordinator was able to cash in tokens from vendors on market day. This required much financial maneuvering prior to market but really was valuable in gaining the trust and meeting the needs of vendors. The first year just over \$5,000.00 in transactions went through our POS machine in 2010 over \$10,000 in transactions occurred with a 300% increase in EBT use the second year.

Cost: \$8040.71 Included hiring a coordinator for two years, education, tent, money boxes, storage boxes for tokens, tokens, signs, POS machine and one year of fees, handouts, large sandwich board signs, vendor participation signs.

Goal #2: Optimizing the impact of the availability of fresh produce for low-income households.

Activities: provide a market newsletter that includes events, recipes and information about accessing the EBT program as well as vendor profiles. Facilitate a health fair; provide advertising and handouts for public that relates to recognizing risk factors.

Summary: The board hired a young couple with a background in journalism and a love for the local foods movement to create a monthly newsletter for six months and to distribute it to market customers, public offices, doctors' offices, senior center, downtown businesses and other gathering centers. In 2009 two health fairs were organized with information on nutrition, a dietician, medics from our fire department conducted blood pressure and sugar testing. During the Saturday and Tuesday health fairs more than 30 people were referred for follow up exams. Several were found to have dangerously high blood pressure or glucose levels which we know from verbal follow up led to doctor visits and intervention. Both activities and the advertising and handouts that accompanied them were valuable and helpful to remind the public that our interest is "Eating better for a Healthy Ross County", not just selling our wares.

Cost: \$5,807.75 This included \$4800.00 for the newsletter which we initially thought was costly but when compared our price to contracting with a professional writer and/or graphic designer, photographer for 400 to 600 copies of a 6 page newsletters for 6 months (printing included) we really got a bargain. The health fair was coordinated by a market member who was reimbursed for his time, the firefighters were volunteers and we printed numerous handouts which we used repeatedly.

Goal # 3: Raising awareness of locally grown, inexpensive, fresh produce at the market and how it can be used in a frugal, healthy diet

Activities: Though this was a secondary activity it became somewhat of a “mantra” for our vendors. After the success of the radio advertising in 2009 we requested that funds for continued advertising be allocated for 2010. What a difference, this was our biggest and most consistent source of media feedback. Each week our local newspaper allows us to submit for print a list of vendors and products which is very popular with our customers. We did print nice, color flyers prior to the May start of Saturday market and the July start of the Tuesday market. Flyers are sent to members and friends of market to be posted in high volume areas. They are also distributed to over 100 local businesses. In that we have vendors from five counties this gives us more coverage over a period of time than advertising in surrounding newspapers. A friend of market donated book marks for local schools and the grant coordinator was paid to disseminate information and to coordinate the radio and newspaper advertising campaign. In 2009 vendors worked with the Healthy Heart Ross County program and provided food for a regional meeting of school cafeteria directors to demonstrate what is locally available. The County Extension office and market manager met regular to discuss dovetailing information about nutrition and market with the community nutrition specialists for low income and senior citizens. We started providing canning classes to interested market customers.

Summary: Advertising and networking work! The best way to let people know what you are doing is to tell them repeatedly. By contracting with the radio and advertising in the newspaper we were able to get several PSA’s that concentrated on healthy eating and community resources for nutrition information. With three different radio stations in town we were able to target a variety of listeners. The market manager appeared on radio four times in 2009 promoting healthy living activities.

Cost: \$10,112

Goal #4: Illuminate the potential for low-income and other grower/producers residents to increase their incomes by participating in the market as vendors

Activities: Advertise with the local Jo One Stop Office, Job and Family Services and the 4-H Extension Office the opportunities of vending at market. Provide handouts for 4-H to promote information on future vending opportunities and responsibilities.

Summary: In the last two years the number of individuals requesting membership applications has increased. Market memberships are now sold out by March 1 for the May start. Those not able to get memberships due to space are encouraged to come as daily vendors and are increasingly future members. With unemployment in our area above 12% in 2009 the market was a new source for income for 4 or 5 vendors that could have qualified for government programs. Many that are poor in Appalachia will not request government assistance and the market provided income that was missing due to low employment in the area. Two vendors in 2010 were able to reduce dependence on government programs due to market income. As one vendor commented at our annual dinner in the fall, "without market we would not have the basics and certainly no Christmas".

Cost: \$165.00

Goal #5: Increasing market attendance and income potential for market vendors, farmers, growers and producers

Activities: Create advertising for the Chamber of Commerce Newsletter and Chamber Webpage which is distributed to over 500 businesses in the area.

Summary: The graphic artist that created our advertising has provided a logo that is now consistently connected to our market. The Chamber advertising had value and new customers as a result. This is a good target audience.

Cost: \$1500.00

Goal #6: Evaluating issues of access and barriers to target populations participating in the Market as vendors and customers.

Activities: Discuss physical barriers for customers with vendors. Work with Chillicothe Transit and Senior Citizen Center on transportation of disabled and low income customers. Be certain that agencies working with target populations understand that we welcome and encourage vendor participation of target groups. Work with BVR to provide all information needed to help vendor set up a new business. Facilitate a dot matrix survey to identify where market customers live.

Summary: Goals 3, 4, 5 and 6 linked together as contact with various agencies developed into a network. We coordinated communication with agencies that deal frequently with our customers. This meant that a group of 7 or 8 agency related representatives consistently knew what we were doing and how that fit with their activities. This reduced some duplication and showed that we wanted to be more than a place that sells food. The outcome was positive with new customers and vendors within the target population.

BENEFICIARIES

There is a tendency to say that when a good organization develops community oriented goals and then creates a network to carry out those goals with money to spend, everyone wins. Obviously there is a need to be a bit more specific. This is divided into Market and Community beneficiaries.

Market beneficiaries: The following is a list of ways in which the FMPP grant has impacted the vendors and the customers of the Chillicothe Farmers' Market

1. Almost 25% increase in new customers between 2008 and 2010. Customer count is an inaccurate science but by counting the number of people in a given entry point for a period of time, several different times a year over three years we believe that our count is consistent with vendor estimation of increase.

2. The implementation of the EBT/Credit/Debit program has generated over \$14,000 in 2010. We can't know that these are new dollars as we don't track each customer but according to vendors, sales are up. EBT use is up 300% in 2010 over 2009. Vendor income was up this year despite one of the worst droughts in recent history.

3. Visibility; our market as seen as a place that people gather for buying, education, information and social interaction. Advertising has brought individuals from more surrounding counties and helped educate target groups about the availability of transportation, EBT, health fairs etc.

4. New Tuesday market: In order to reach more low income families we started a new Tuesday market in 2009 and continued in 2010. This shorter market provides another sales venue for vendors and we see customers that don't come to the Saturday market.

5. Incubator businesses: Our market has served as a test for several local products that have now become regional. Ben's Mustard, Fudgecake Company, Bella's Brushetta, Liz's Puffcorn have developed into regional businesses and started or grew as a result of exposure at the Chillicothe Market. Three vendors have started restaurants or catering businesses as a result of market experience.

Community Beneficiaries: When customers spend their money locally it benefits the local economy substantially. Over the two years of the grant we have formed partnerships with the following organizations. We can now tell their story as they tell ours.

1. Ross County Extension: Food, farmers and education happen here and if you need a teacher for a canning class, access of future farmers or nutrition planning classes such as "dining with diabetes" or "nutrition for those with cancer" are a natural outreach for market vendors. All markets should know their extension agent; they always post information in their newsletters for us and on the website. The agent is on radio almost every week and will announce any program that we have going.

2. Transit Authority: Getting those without cars to the market is a challenge but the Ross County Transit Authority and the Senior Citizen Center can make it happen. A couple of the assisted living centers also provided transportation.

3. Media outlets: For the first time in our nine year history we had money to do advertising. Local media outlets have always been very generous in giving us public service time but we found that a sustained, targeted campaign had a huge impact. Advertising does help when done well; we received more air time than we paid for in that we were paying customers. Radio, newspaper, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Associates.

4. cooks and chefs: We are not a community with an abundance of upscale restaurants. Cooking demonstrations depended on individuals that have a talent to create good foods with local products. We have one vendor that is a trained chef that helps often but the fun is to find new people that can do “summer on the grill” or “down home healthy barbecue”. Our customers love it as they see someone, like them, using a cooking talent.

5. Health Organizations and Public Service Groups: Our health fair and our weekly community tent provide a place that dieticians, physicians, medics, health department employees and others can disseminate information and connect with large numbers of people.

LESSONS LEARNED

Providing customers options to enjoy their farmer’s market experience in a way that they are treated with dignity and respect is good for growing a business.

Lessons learned fall into two categories:

1. Creating an infrastructure for new programs: This was the “nuts and bolts” of setting up the equipment, personnel and training necessary to initiate the EBT token program. Essentially we were dealing with our vendors and had multiple

ways of communicating repetitively and consistently with them. Each step of the way they knew what we were doing and why, there was no pressure to participate but ultimately all wanted to be a part when they saw the benefits. This part was time consuming but the feedback was immediate and measurable.

2. Educating Target Groups about the value of eating a healthy diet and understanding the availability of local produce: Creating advertising campaigns to help meet this goal was new for our organization; we needed to consult with those that have worked with nutrition programs in the community. The number of low income and handicapped people coming to market , asking vendors questions and reporting to outreach coordinators from other agencies that they enjoyed the market experience increased during the life of the grant. This project has made all of our vendors more aware of how they explain their product, having recipes for customers, being patient. Knowing that we would not reach everyone, we feel positive about the people identified at our health fair that had follow up evaluations and those that use EBT tokens that come regularly for healthy baked goods and new fruits and vegetables. As we complete the project we also feel dismayed by the new found enormity of how food and health negatively impact life in our area.

RECCOMENTATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our experience is that all FMPP grants should be two to three year programs from the beginning if they are dealing with goals of changing behavior. There was progress during our first year but without the extension to continue a second year we would not have seen the impact that we did.

Eating habits of the rural poor, not just in Appalachia, are based on misinformation about “cheap” food, learned behavior and addiction to sugars. One of our vendors suggested that “cooking centers” be created in low income housing areas where people could socialize, learn to cook and can and create menus that they like. So many programs are run by “outsiders” and these centers could be run by a resident of the area in tandem with a dietician or program

director. We definitely see a need for more research on the diets of the rural and urban poor.

Thanks USDA and our steady contact liaisons for a wonderful opportunity. This was lots of work, but worth doing. Good fortune to future recipients.

Contact:

Bartow (Bart) Henshaw

5324 Egypt Pike/ Chillicothe, OH. 45601

740.773.6702

johnhen@horizonview.net

