Cultivating a Healthy Environment for Farmers (CHEF)

Corporation for Findlay Market of Cincinnati, OH received $57,109 to: recruit, train, and provide start-up resources for new farmers to grow produce on vacant urban lots and sell at the Findlay Market; create a composting system to recycle food wastes from the market (using the compost to fertilize locally-grown fresh produce); and redesign a conventional token dispensing machine to accept EBT-issued cards.
Funds were used to purchase farming tools and for the new farmers; acquire an on-site composting system unit; purchase a conventional token dispensing machine and necessary modification supplies; and provide a stipend to students to modify the token dispensing machine.

Final Report

THE CORPORATION FOR FINDLAY MARKET

A tax exempt non-profit management organization preserving, promoting, and operating historic Findlay Market

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Final Report

Award OH-045-2008-G-0741
CHEF Project

Project Summary

The *Cultivating a Healthy Environment for Farmers (CHEF)* project enhanced the Corporation's efforts to enlarge a vibrant farmers market in Cincinnati's urban core. It provided training and education about the benefits, challenges and logistics of agricultural direct marketing to women, minorities, and immigrants, which improved the participants' ability to be successful entrepreneurs and increased the number of local food producers in our community. This increased access to fresh produce in a low income neighborhood and, thereby, improved community health and nutrition. The project created environmental benefits by diverting food waste generated by the farmers market and other businesses at Findlay Market out of the trash stream and composting it. This reduced the market's solid waste load on local landfills. The alternative purchasing component of the project was intended to automate the purchase of farmers market tokens for food stamp and WIC shoppers, but the Corporation was unable to find a manufacturer of token dispensing equipment willing to convert a machine from credit card capability to EBT card capability.

Project Approach

The *Cultivating a Healthy Environment for Farmers (CHEF)* project had three major program elements.

- Growing farmers: recruiting and training women, minority, and low income urban farmers to produce fresh food for sale at Findlay Market's seasonal farmers markets.
- Alternative purchasing: the development of automated systems for food stamp shoppers to purchase farmers market tokens using, their EBT cards, to buy fresh, local produce in Findlay Market's seasonal farmers markets.
- Waste management: the purchase, installation, and implementation of equipment and administrative systems to separate food waste produced at Findlay Market from the solid waste stream and compost it.

Outcomes Achieved

Growing Farmers:

Accomplishments

- The CHEF Project urban farming program started during the 2009 growing season with four urban farmers cultivating less than one-quarter acre.
- During the 2010 growing season, twenty-five adult urban farmers and eleven youth gardeners participated in the CHEF Project urban farming program.
- During the 2010 season, the CHEF Project grew food on five garden sites totaling about three acres in the city of Cincinnati. The area under cultivation was about 54,000 square feet.
- The 2010 CHEF Project urban farmers included low income African Americans, non-English speaking Burundian immigrants, non-English speaking Hispanics, unemployed or underemployed young adults, and youth gardeners.
- The CHEF Project urban farmers were organized into nine teams. Teams were trained and coached regarding production gardening, effective selling at a farmers market, and small business development.
- The seven CHEF Project urban farming teams participated in Tuesday and Sunday farmers markets at Findlay Market each week from June through October 2010. Youth gardeners participated in the Saturday farmers market.
- Most of the urban farming teams, in addition to participating in farmers markets, sold fresh food directly to full-time Findlay Market merchants and to local restaurants.
- We were unsuccessful at getting all of the teams to keep careful records of their production and sales. However, three teams kept good records and all teams kept some records. We estimate that the CHEF Project adult urban farmers sold between $12,000 and $16,000 worth of produce during the 2010 season. The youth gardening program reported sales of $7,707.
- Overall, CHEF Project urban farmers increased the number of local growers participating in Findlay Market's 2010 farmers markets by more than twelve percent. CHEF Project farmers more than doubled the number of growers in the Tuesday farmers market.
- At this writing, all of the 2010 season CHEF Project urban farmers have expressed a desire to participate again during the 2011 growing season.
- During the 2010 growing season, the CHEF Project attracted more than $29,000 in donated goods and services and more than 1,400 hours of volunteer help.
- Hoop houses were erected in 2009 and 2010 on two of the five growing sites and will be used to extend the spring and fall growing seasons during 2011.

Alternative Purchasing:

Accomplishments

- We were unable during the term of the FMPP grant to persuade a manufacturer, or find the engineering support, to modify an automatic token dispensing machine to accept payment by EBT card. Conventional, off-the-shelf token dispensers accept credit and debit cards, so automating the sale of farmers market food stamp tokens remains a goal.
- Although unable to automate the sale of farmers market tokens to food stamp shoppers, Findlay Market continues to serve as a third party administrator for WIC and SNAP

transactions. By purchasing farmers market tokens with their EBT card, participants can use SNAP benefits to buy fresh, local fruits and vegetables in our farmers markets.

- During the 2010 farmers market season, Findlay Market designed and launched a program called SNAP Plus. SNAP Plus rewards food stamp shoppers who attend cooking and nutritional education classes by doubling their SNAP benefits in the farmers market. Accordingly, a SNAP Plus food stamp shopper who attends a class can purchase up to ten dollars in farmers market tokens and receive an additional ten dollars in tokens to spend in Findlay Market's farmers markets.
- SNAP Plus was funded with a $25,000 grant from the P&G (Proctor and Gamble) Fund and a $5,000 grant from the Meshewa Farms Foundation.
- SNAP Plus nutrition classes were conducted by the Hamilton County OSU Extension Service and by the Nutrition Council of Greater Cincinnati. Local chefs conducted cooking classes.
- Fifty-six food stamp recipients participated in the SNAP Plus cooking and nutrition classes.
- A total of 1,560 SNAP Plus vouchers valued at five dollars each were distributed to food stamp recipients who attended cooking and nutrition classes.
- The SNAP Plus program helped double the volume of food stamp purchases in Findlay Market's farmers markets, to $3,526, during 2010 compared to 2009.
- Many SNAP Plus vouchers were not redeemed during the 2010 farmers market season. The program will continue in 2011 and vouchers distributed in 2010 will be honored in 2011.

Waste Management:

Accomplishments

- In November 2009, after an eight month application and review process, Findlay Market's registration was approved by the Ohio EPA and the Cincinnati Health Department licensed the market to operate the first urban Class II Composting Facility in the state of Ohio.
- Two Earth Tub in-vessel composting units were installed in November 2009.
- Wagons and buckets were purchased for transporting compost and recyclables.
- To facilitate the composting operation, market staff took over the transportation and management of all solid waste solid waste produced at Findlay Market beginning in January 2010.
- More than 70,000 pounds of food waste will be composted at Findlay Market during 2010.
- About 250,000 thousand pounds of cardboard, paper, glass, metal, and plastic will be recycled at Findlay Market during 2010.
- During 2010, half of the solid waste produced at Findlay Market was diverted from the landfill through composting and recycling.
- Approximately 10,000 pounds of finished compost was produced during 2010. Findlay Market's Ohio EPA registration prohibits it from distributing finished compost beyond its facilities without testing each load for pathogens and heavy metals. Consequently, at this time all finished compost is used within the facilities on the market's trees, landscaping islands, and flower beds.

Beneficiaries

The following people and groups benefited from the CHEF Project.

- Twenty-five adult and eleven youth urban farmers received tools, training, coaching, and land to grow food on for sale in the Findlay Market farmers markets.
- Hundreds of farmers market shoppers, including low income neighborhood residents, benefited from improved access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown vegetables sold by CHEF Project urban farmers at Findlay Market.
- Thousands of pounds of food grown by CHEF Project urban farmers and transported only a short distance to Findlay Market displaced food shipped to Cincinnati by truck and thereby improved air quality for Cincinnati residents.
- Fifty-six food stamp shoppers participated in cooking and nutrition education classes provided as part of the SNAP Plus program, an element of Findlay Market's alternative purchasing services.
- The people of greater Cincinnati benefited from the 70,000 pounds of food waste not buried in the city's landfill during 2010 as a result of composting operations supported by the CHEF Project.
- Other urban composting projects, such as one at Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, learned from the CHEF Project composting operation, the first urban composting facility licensed by the Ohio EPA, and are now licensed and diverting food waste from Cincinnati's landfill.

Lessons Learned

- The cost of preparing vacant property in the urban core to grow food was much higher than anticipated. Most vacant urban property was discovered to be lacking in soil, which had to be brought in.
- To be successful, low income urban farmer trainees need additional support – transportation, literacy, child care, team building, communications, and sometimes housing – that were beyond the resources of the CHEF Project to provide.
- Strong partner organizations are essential to providing the additional support required, as described above.
- The potential for generating significant supplemental income for low income people from urban farming is real.
- Food waste can be safely composted in a dense urban environment.

Additonal Information

Urban farming program logo

David and Sarah

David with harvest

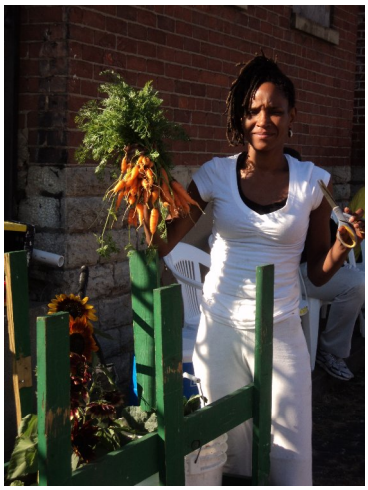
Elm and Liberty urban farm

Hoop house 350.org volunteer work party

Elm and Liberty urban farm – north portion

Hoop house 350.org volunteer work party

U.S. Representative Steve Driehaus at hoop house dedication



Artia with harvest

Artia at market

Burundian urban farmers

Pleasant Street urban farm site water supply

Burundian urban farmers

Pleasant Street urban farm site

SNAP Plus program logo

SNAP Plus cooking demonstration

SNAP Plus nutrition class

SNAP Plus nutrition class

Greening the Market program logo

Findlay Market composting and recycling area

Food waste to be composted in Earth Tub

Finished compost being unloaded from Earth Tub

Spreading finished compost

Compost facility dedication and press event with Hamilton County Commission President Todd Portune