



Illinois Department of Agriculture
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**Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
(SCBGP-FB)
FFY 08
12-25-B-0842**

Final Performance Report

Submitted: December 1, 2010

2009 Illinois Farmers Market Advertising Grant Program

2010 Annual Specialty Crop, Agritourism and Organic Conference

Series of Educational Events Targeting Farmers Market Vendors and Managers

Project Title:

2009 Illinois Farmers Market Advertising Grant Program (FFY08 SCBGP-FB)

Project Summary:

Producers that direct market and farmers markets typically do not have extra dollars to allocate toward promoting their products or market. An advertising grant program allows these direct marketers and farmers markets to increase their competitiveness and local awareness by providing additional funds for use in the various media avenues. Projects were funded that included but were not limited to television advertising, radio advertising, newspaper ads, signs, banners and billboards. By providing an avenue to allow a market to have additional local exposure it was hoped that it would create additional domestic demand for the specialty crop products in Illinois.

The consumers of Illinois annually expend \$48 billion on the food they eat. Agricultural production does not currently meet the population's consumption demand, consequently, most food dollars travel out of the State. These dollars may ultimately cycle back into Illinois but there is a lot of potential for the growth of local food systems to allow for local economies to directly benefit from these food sales. Retention of these food dollars within Illinois through development of direct sales locations such as farmers markets will strive to meet the consumer's demand for locally produced food.

This Farmers Market Advertising Grant Program was a continuation of previously funded Specialty Crop Block Grant Program projects in Illinois. This program allowed for increased awareness at regional and local levels of the specialty crops raised in Illinois that were available at farmers markets throughout the State. Exposure of the markets through the various advertising campaigns with the overarching statewide theme ("Illinois...Where Fresh Is" logo program) allowed for all of the farmers markets and direct markets within the boundaries of Illinois to benefit and expand.

An increase in the reach of Illinois' farmers markets was demonstrated quantitatively and qualitatively by subgrantees as a result of SCBGP-FB and SCBGP funds. The number of farmers markets increased, the number of specialty crop producers participating in farmers markets all over Illinois increased and the number of consumers exposed to farmers markets in their area as well as those purchasing specialty crops at those markets all increased over the period of time that the grant funds were active within the communities. Grant funds allowed for increased sales of specialty crops by encouraging people to make purchases of local specialty crops at farmers markets thereby increasing the competitiveness of the local grown products.

Project Approach:

A competitive grant program was established and the request for proposals was distributed to Farmers Market contacts and direct farm market contacts. A total of 71 grant applications requesting \$459,242.11 for various sub-projects within their proposals were received. These requests represent an 29% increase in the amount of proposals received and a 36% increase in funding requests.

An internal review committee evaluated the submitted proposals with their sub-projects and determined the projects and funding levels that were funded. Each project was evaluated based on the perceived benefit to the state's specialty crop industry as demonstrated within the submitted proposal. Projects were funded that would in some way increase the exposure of the specialty crop industry, to allow for new producers to enter the market, or to allow established producers to expand their production levels to meet the consumers' demand.

A total of 50 grants totaling \$226,102.00 were administered (70.42% of proposed projects were funded and 49% of total funds requested were granted). These fifty grants were funded with two sources of Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds (SCBGP) — FFY08 SCBGP (12-25-B-0842 = \$93,537.00) and FFY08 SCBGF-FB (12-25-B-0786 = \$132,565.00). Funds were forwarded to the grantees at the beginning of the grant period. Monthly reports were required of each grantee on the first business day of each month from the time the grant agreement was executed until the end of the grant period or the point at which the final report was submitted. These monthly reports required project details to be reported including: Detailed update on each project task, Identification of any grant project related challenges, Brief narrative of overall project accomplishments, and a Budget sheet detailing grant related expenditures for the month.

Final reports were due within 30 days of the completion of the grant period or at the point when all grant funds were expended and the sub-projects were deemed complete. All final written reports required a narrative describing the work performed, copies or some type of documentation (photos, etc.) of all completed grant funded works, narrative describing results obtained and economic impact that resulted from grant funded activities. The final written report narrative evaluated the success of the project and identified the performance measures used in the evaluation. Information and specific details regarding the results and corresponding impact of the grant funded projects were encouraged.

A list of the subgrantees, grant amounts, grant agreement language and project city are listed in a table at the end of this document. The grant agreement language detailed the scope of the projects funded. These projects covered a large amount of advertising related subprojects.

This program was viewed by the communities involved directly and indirectly, as a huge success. The discontinuation of this advertising program was met with many comments from the market vendors and managers. Many small vendors, especially during their business start-up phase, sell at farmers markets. Often times, these market experiences allow them to gain knowledge, experience and sophistication to expand and sell their products to larger retail establishments, schools or regional distributors. Illinois has seen growth in the number of markets, producers, and vendors. This growth can in part be attributed to these advertising campaigns that covered the State with the "Illinois...Where Fresh Is" message.

The farmers markets' vendors, managers, sponsoring organizations and ultimately their communities have been the major driver resulting in the success in the program. Without their efforts to provide the consumers of Illinois with good, wholesome Illinois produced specialty crops, the growth of this local foods movement and the Illinois specialty crop industry would not have been possible. The future of this industry in Illinois looks exciting and capable of future expansion to allow for its competitiveness to increase.

Sub-Projects Means of Broadcasting the Specialty Crop Message

(with and without grant funds)

- Concentrated on promotion and education
- Various Signage
 - Billboard
 - Directional
 - On-Site
- Media Advertising Spots
 - Radio
 - Television
 - Print (Newspaper ads and inserts)
- Brochures, Flyers, Posters
- Newsletters
- Establishment or expansion of use of website and email
- Labeling / Packaging

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Goals

As set forth in the proposal for this project the Expected Measurable Outcomes were:

1. Provide grants to at least 25 Illinois farmers markets; this would be equivalent to 10% of the eligible markets.
2. Subgrantees would have the following goals for each advertising project included in this state-wide program:
 - a. Demonstrate an increase in the number of farmers market customers
 - b. Demonstrate an increase in the number of vendors in the participating farmers markets
 - c. Demonstrate an increase in the number of visitors to farmers markets individual vendors resulting from increased advertising. Impact may also be measured through visits to vendors outside of farmers market days.
 - d. Demonstrate an increase in sales receipts of market vendors
 - e. Additional measurements as deemed pertinent.

This program was a continuation of a similar grant program that was undertaken utilizing earlier Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds. The goal of this program was to increase sales of specialty crops in Illinois by increasing the domestic competitiveness of Illinois specialty crops. Past advertising grant programs within the State had been extremely successful. Previous grant participants had increased their customer base as well as had positive impacts on individual companies income as well as local economies. These economic benefits resulted from increase awareness of Illinois specialty crops.

Outcomes Achieved

Final reports were collected from all grant subgrantees. Quantitative and Qualitative data was collected from these subgrantee reports. A summary of data reported as it relates to the 2009 Illinois Farmers Market Advertising Program Goals are:

1. Number of Grants

Grants were undertaken with fifty subgrantees — farmers markets. The number of grants administered represents approximately 20% of the know farmers markets at that time. The markets were geographically spread throughout the State of Illinois. The markets represented ranged from start-up situations to those that had been in existence for decades. Sophistication of market structure and organization ranged from all volunteer to paid employees supported by a sponsoring business within the community.

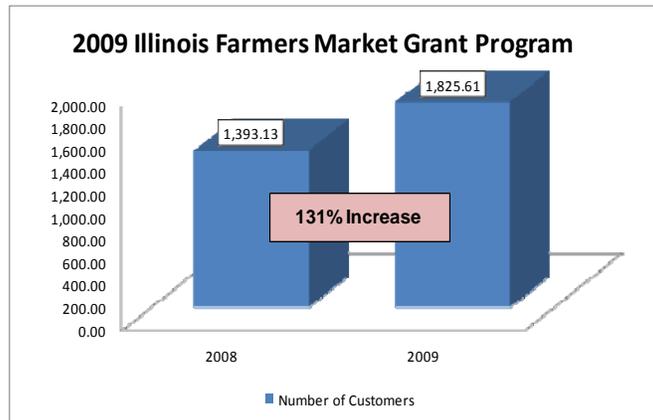
2. Subgrantee Requirements

Sophistication of final reports submitted by subgrantees were directly related to the market structure and organizational capacities. Results were reported quantitatively and qualitatively. The differing reports are summarized in the comments that follow as well as the table at the end of this report.

a. Number of farmers market customers

Data collected from subgrantees indicated that in 2008 an average of 1,393.13 customers were tallied at the responding farmers markets. In 2009, the average number of customers was calculated to be 1,825.61. This demonstrated a 132% increase quantitatively.

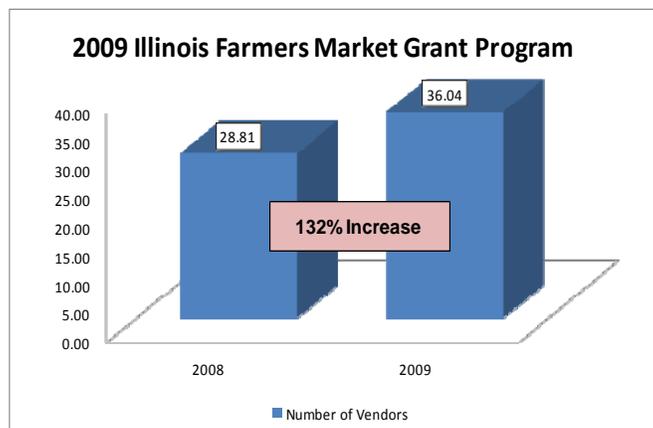
Qualitative responses in general also were on the positive end but a few markets did indicate observations that ranged from fewer customers to more customers buying fewer items to more customers. Some reported adverse affects such as weather, wet start to the growing season and the economy. Many reported terrific impacts resulting from increased regional advertising.



b. Number of farmers market vendors

Vendor participation showed similar increases in quantitative numbers reported. In 2008, subgrantees reported that 1,297 vendors participated in the 45 subgrantees' markets for an average of 28.81 vendors per reporting market. For 2009, a total of 38 markets reported 1,369 participating vendors for an average of 36.04 per market. That calculates to be an increase of 132%.

Qualitatively the report were also positive. Many markets drew vendors from a larger area. Several reported new producers/vendors. Reports were also submitted that indicated that many vendors were increasing their production to meet demand created by increased number of markets as well as the increased customer base that the advertising program created. Several subgrantees tracked customer and vendor responses to grant supported advertisements. Overall, the increase in advertisements benefited all of the markets within the State of Illinois. One or two subgrantees reported decreases in the number of vendors but these situations were attributed to either complications with the actual market or competition from new markets in the same region.



c. Number of visitors to farmers markets individual vendors resulting from increased advertising

No data regarding this goal/objective was collected quantitatively from the subgrantees. This goal/objective will be discussed within the next goal/objective.

d. Market Vendor Sales

No data regarding this goal/objective was collected quantitatively from the subgrantees. Data collected from subgrantees regarding this goal/objective were positive. Markets reported that vendor sales increased from 10% to 65%. Many indicated that at some markets, the vendors ran out of product. This would indicate that demand was greater than supply. The economic impact of the increase advertising was documented in many market reports.

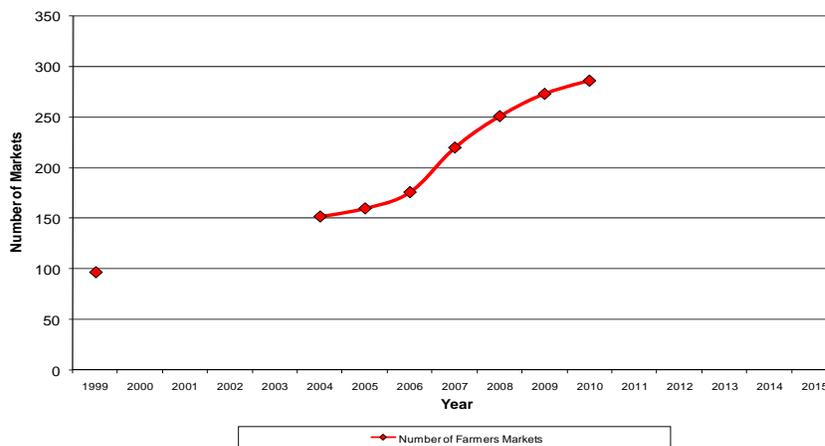
Sales number showed a strong impact on future plans that were included in these reports. Markets indicated that plans for future market seasons included expanding vendor participation, increase vendor production and the identification of potential producer/vendors.

e. Additional measurements as deemed pertinent.

Report data indicated that the grant funded advertising campaigns that focused on farmers markets directly or indirectly resulted in the following summarized observations:

- Growth in the specialty crop industry in Illinois as demonstrated by an increase in new producers/vendors
- Customer base that included farmers markets within their weekly shopping patterns increased
- Increased participation and interest in LINK/SNAP EBT programs being offered at farmers markets
- Educational programs targeting the customer base as well as the youth were beneficial to the farmers markets. Many of the markets that incorporate these programs indicated growth in participant numbers.
- The number of farmers markets in the State of Illinois grew during this period of time to place Illinois as the state with the third greatest number of markets (286) in the United States in 2010.

Illinois Farmers Markets



Beneficiaries:

The direct beneficiaries reached by this Specialty Crop Block Grant Program were the vendors, customers and communities of the grant supported farmers markets in Illinois. The assistance provided by the 2009 Illinois Farmers Market Advertising Grant benefited the 50 farmers markets and their surrounding communities and assisted over 1,369 vendors in 2009. More than 50,000 customers were directly reached with the "Illinois...Where Fresh Is" message. The number of consumers touched by this message that were not quantitatively reported or were exposed to this message would be even greater. Indirectly, this program benefited all of the 273 markets in Illinois in 2009, a dramatic increase from the 90 markets identified in the late 1990's.

The applicants in general expressed optimism in that these grant funded projects will result in continued growth of the specialty crop industry in Illinois and the impact will be felt for several years into the future and the prospect of new or expanded producers to meet the growing need for local specialty crops was increased by this program.

Illinois has been busy in regards to the local foods movement. Many projects are active that involve local food systems within the State. The farmers markets are just one of the many key elements of each local food system. The Illinois General Assembly formed the Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force that released a report to the Illinois General Assembly in March 2009 entitled "Local Food, Farms & Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy". Within the report it stated:

"The popularity of farmers markets is a measure of consumer demand that now reaches into large-volume wholesale markets."

Since the Task Force Report was released, the Illinois General Assembly demonstrated the State's commitment to this "local" food movement by establishing the permanent Illinois Local Foods Farms and Jobs Task Force. The Illinois General Assembly purpose for the Council is:

"to facilitate the growth of an Illinois-based local farm and food product economy that revitalizes rural and urban communities, promotes healthy eating with access to fresh foods, creates jobs, ensures a readily available supply of safe food in an emergency event, and supports economic growth through making local farm or food products available to all Illinois citizens. " - Public Act 96-579

The future of the specialty crop industry in Illinois is exciting. The potential for future growth and increased competitiveness are abundantly evident. The specialty crop industry of Illinois is appreciative for the opportunities connected to this USDA funded grant program and many are currently involved or are looking to be involved with future opportunities.

Lessons Learned:

The main lesson learned by the grant program manager within the Illinois Department of Agriculture was how positively this program was viewed by the specialty crop industry within Illinois. There was an overwhelming amount of positive comments regarding the farmers market advertising grant program and an even greater amount of comments expressing disbelief when the program was discontinued for the 2010 market season due to changes within the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. But, the farmers market community within Illinois has had several years of advertising support and the growth of the number of markets, the number of vendors and the crowds of dedicated customers when combined with the excitement revolving around the local food movement can only be expected to grow on into the future. All involved with this project are extremely grateful for the opportunity to give this sector of Illinois agriculture an enormous boost towards continued growth and opportunity for specialty crop producers.

In general all projects were deemed successful by the applicants and many market managers and vendors were encouraged and excited about the next market season and were going to use the time between seasons for evaluation and planning for the next year's market.

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Project Title:

2010 Annual Specialty Crop, Agritourism and Organic Conference

Project Summary:

The 2010 Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference, held January 6-8 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, expanded to include programming for the Illinois Specialty Growers Association (fruit, vegetable, and herb growers), the Agricultural Tourism Partners of Illinois (ATPI), the Illinois Irrigation Association, and Illinois organic growers. The overall effort featured three pre-conference workshops on Wednesday, January 6 and seven tracks of concurrent sessions on Thursday and Friday, January 7-8.

The purpose of the conference is to assist 500 specialty crop producers in (1) managing their production and price risk; (2) educating specialty crop producers in developing "Good Agricultural Practices," "Good Manufacturing Practices," and "Good Handling Practices," as it relates to their production of specialty crops; (3) increase our consumer knowledge as it relates to the child and adult nutrition advantages from the consumption of specialty crops; (4) assist our producers with incorporating agritourism as a value-added opportunity; (5) promote food safety practices to our growers throughout the production and marketing chain; (6) encourage consumers to buy local and buy fresh produce; (7) provide educational programming on disease and pest management control in the production of fruits and vegetables; and (8) provide a tract of workshops on organic production and marketing and to assist organic growers with being in compliance with the National Organic Standards. The mission of the Illinois Specialty Growers Association is to put more money into member's pockets through educational programming, commodity promotions, legislative and regulatory oversight, and networking opportunities.

Project Approach:

The Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference had educational sessions aimed at impacting the entire specialty crop industry -from growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs both conventionally and organically and provide value-added opportunities by incorporating agritourism activities into the producer's operation. Producers were offered the opportunity to learn production and marketing techniques, but also had opportunity to learn how to sell an "experience" at their farm market by incorporating agritourism activities.

The program addressed various aspects related to entering and competing in the wholesale market arena. Issues investigated include invoicing, pricing, marketing, packaging, supply, labeling, delivery, insurance, quality assurance, certification and audits. This portion of the educational agenda had a good fit with industry needs as wholesale markets search to satisfy demand for local produce and producers search for additional marketing opportunities.

A trade show featuring cutting-edge technology gave producers an opportunity to view equipment, crop protection products, new fertilizers, new seed varieties, packaging supplies, new marketing opportunities through Market Maker and produce auction markets, greenhouse infrastructure items, food items available for resale in a roadside market (i.e. bakery items, jams and jellies, etc.), crop insurance products available to producers which enable them to manage risk, and exhibits geared to producing produce organically and how to comply with the National Organic Standards.

This conference benefited the specialty crop industry by incorporating both conventional and organic production practices and provide opportunities for producers to market their production through retail and/or wholesale outlets. It also provided information to roadside marketers on how to incorporate agritourism activities which could provide a value-added opportunity to their operation.

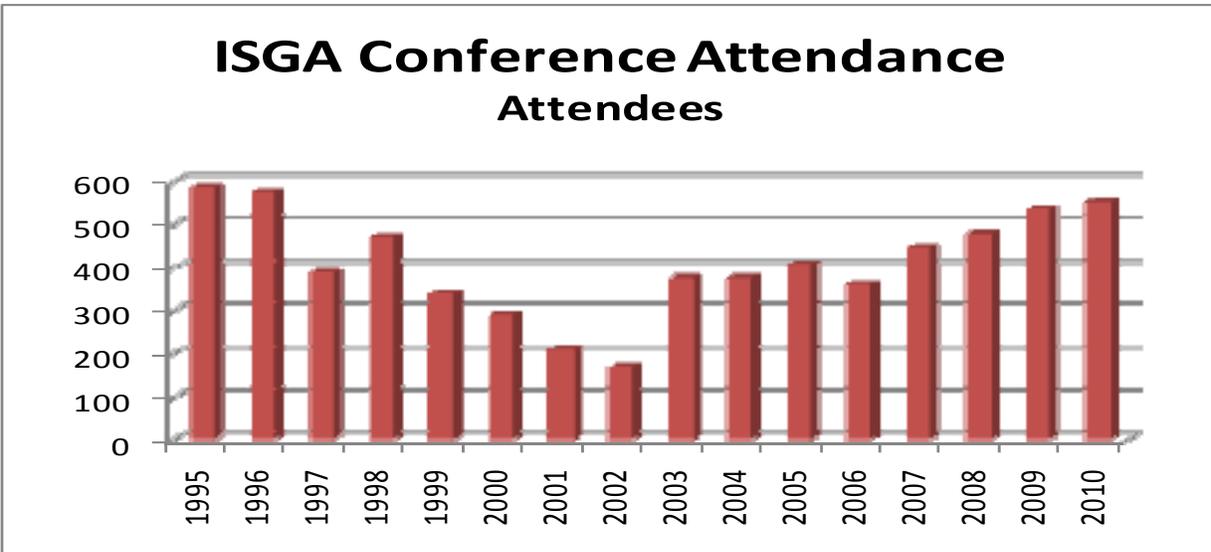
Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Goals

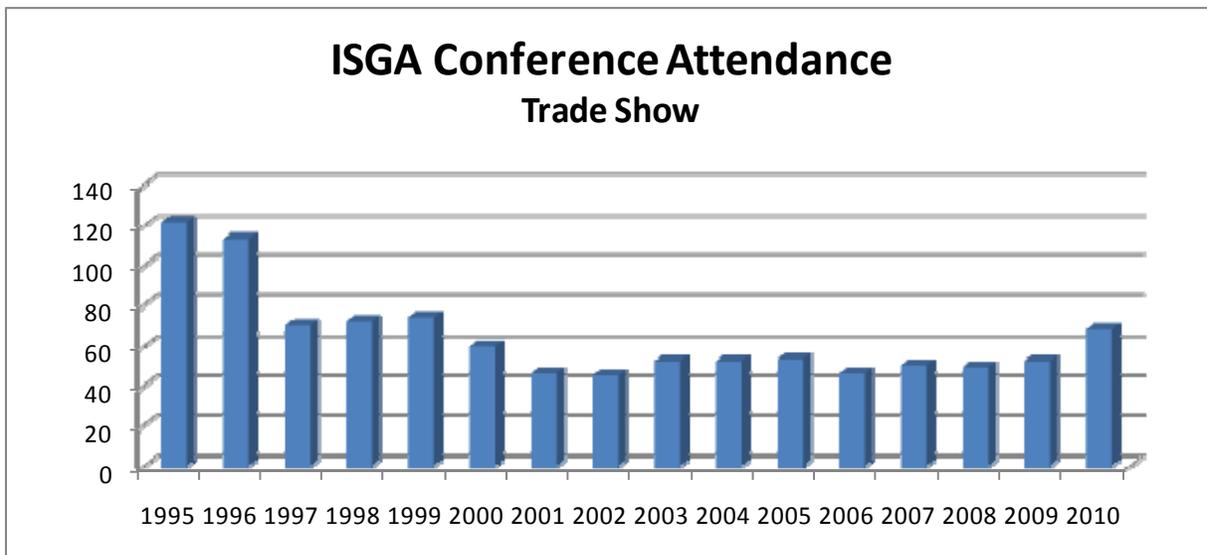
1. Increase conference attendance by 20% over last year's attendance.
2. Increase trade show exhibitors by 10% over last year's participation.
3. Develop educational programming with topics that will assist producers with their decision making including AGR-Lite and GAP/GHP
4. Increase ISGA membership by 10% by promoting membership at the registration desk during the conference.

Outcomes Achieved

1. Attendance



2. Trade Show Exhibitors



3. Educational Programming

See Conference Flyer attached to this report for additional details.

The three pre-conference workshops held on Wednesday, January 6, 2010 were: (1) Grow Your Market: Creating a Memorable Experience for Customers – a workshop for farmers market managers and vendors; (2) Getting Started in Local Food Production and Marketing; and (3) Expanding Seasons and Markets with High Tunnels. All drew great audiences, with about 180 in attendance for the three programs combined.

On Thursday, January 7, the kickoff for the main conference included excellent presentations on MarketMaker by Dar Knipe, University of Illinois Extension Specialist, and on Keys to Effective Marketing by Tim Woods, University of Kentucky. Both stressed the opportunities for Illinois growers to expand markets and profits.

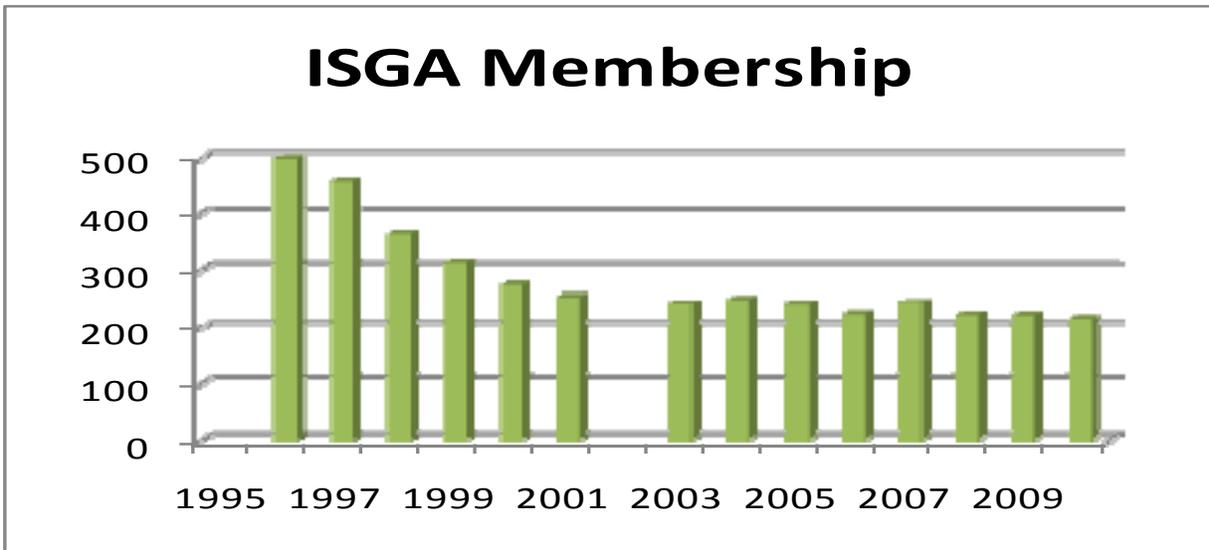
The remainder of the January 7-8 program featured up to seven concurrent program tracks on fruits, vegetables, agritourism and marketing, irrigation, business management, and organic production. Invited speakers in the fruit track included Jim Schupp from Penn State University on plant growth regulators and thinning programs for apples and peaches; Eric Hansen of Michigan State University on fertility programs for fruit production; and Ed Baushke, a grower from Benton Harbor, Michigan, on growing and marketing apples and peaches in southwestern Michigan. The fruit track also included talks on insecticide resistance management by Rick Weinzierl, bacterial diseases of apples and peaches by Mohammad Babadoost, apple and peach rootstocks by Mosbah Kushad, and grower discussions of the 2009 crop season.

For vegetable growers, Carl Cantaluppi of North Carolina State University's Extension Service wowed the audience with lots of insights and recommendations on asparagus production, and Don and Shirley Ahrens of Junction, IL, gave a great summary of the how's and why's of their roadside marketing enterprise. A squash and cucumber session included talks on production practices, disease, insect, and weed management, and grower insights by Bill Shoemaker, Mohammad Babadoost, Rick Weinzierl, Elizabeth Wahle, Wayne Sirles, Harry Alten, and Mike Flamm. Alan Walters, Bill Shoemaker, Jeff Kindhart, Elizabeth Wahle, and Bronwyn Aly summarized numerous cultivar evaluations for specialty pumpkins, tomatoes (including heirloom tomatoes), peppers, and sweet corn.

A variety of herb, agritourism and organic-related presentations rounded out the two-day conference. Despite some unwanted winter weather conditions on Thursday, overall attendance still superseded last years at around 500 participants.

A copy of the survey results compiled from conference attendees is also attached. In general, the conference and its content were very well received by the industry participants in attendance.

4. ISGA Membership



Beneficiaries:

The Illinois Specialty Growers Association (ISGA) is an umbrella association for Illinois State Horticulture Society, Illinois Vegetable Growers Association, Illinois Herb Association, and Illinois Irrigation Association ISGA partners with several commodity organizations, agribusiness professionals, and members of academia in delivering the Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism, and Organic Conference. The actual reach of this conference has a scope that covers various entities involved with producing and marketing specialty crops in the Midwest region.

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Project Title:

Farmers Market Manager and Vendor Workshops - GAP/GHP Training

Project Summary:

According to the USDA, Illinois has the third highest number of farmers markets in the United States. This market venue is extremely important in the sales of Illinois produced specialty crops directly to the consumer. This means of distribution is typically an easy one for new producers to get involved with this sector of agribusiness. Entry into the industry through involvement at a farmers market allows the producers to grow their production, their maturity and sophistication and in many cases the producer expands production to meet increase demand for new markets and an expanding customer base. In a few cases, producers have expanded into direct retail sales at larger venues such as grocery outlets, schools and distribution centers.

One piece lacking in Illinois has been the ability for producers, vendors and market managers to engage in educational opportunities. Organization on an informal basis has been attempted within the farmers market sector in the past in the State, but for various reasons, the structure did not maintain itself over time. The recent upsurge in the local food movements have placed farmers markets front and center in many communities. Most are organized by volunteers and many lack structural sophistication to succeed, grow and maintain its economic benefits to the region. The demand for organization and education was expressed by the managers and vendors involved with these markets.

Several events were planned over the grant period that allowed for regional meetings, webinars, conference calls and centrally located meetings to be conducted. Popularity and involvement with these events has proven invaluable and popular. Similar events will be planned in the future to continue to meet the needs of those involved with the specialty crop industry in Illinois to enhance their ability to be competitive.

Project Approach:

One of the most valuable aspects that resulted from this program was the development of an informal group of individuals and organizational representatives that have spent numerous hours planning, discussion, analyzing and conducting these educational events. None of what has been accomplished would be possible without the efforts of these participants that have demonstrated continuously their passion and belief in the specialty crop industry in Illinois. Communication through conference calls and emails has allowed for this group to regularly discuss various issues and opportunities. The individuals and organizations involved has remained fluid over time. Some that are active have been involved from the beginning, others have come and gone as their other responsibilities and activities have dictated.

Grant funds were conservatively used to support these educational efforts and typically were used in cases where other support opportunities were not available. The vast amount of in-kind support of these projects as donated by these involved entities is not determinable. But without their activities and support, the scope of this program would not have been possible.

From the onset of this program, the organizing group felt it was important to incorporate technology to maximize the reach for those that had limited travel opportunities so conference calls, emails and webinars were utilized where appropriate to maximize audience reach and accessibility. But at the same time, the value of actual face to face meetings was also recognized. Consequently, a pattern was established where an annual, centrally located meeting was planned in conjunction with the Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism and Organic Conference, the one state-wide meeting held that incorporated the greatest number of specialty crop participants.

Secondly, it quickly became evident that in a State as large and diverse as Illinois, regional meetings to address differences would be valuable. The first year, the State was broken down into 3 regions — North, Central and South. The second year, a new region was added — Chicago and collar counties. Each region has its own flavor when it comes to specialty crops, producers, market vendors, market managers and levels of market sophistication. Needs vary greatly amongst the regions. Customers vary between regions as well. These regional meetings have proven to be very valuable and popular.

One of the most popular results of this program was the development of the "Illinois...Where Fresh Is" website (www.illinoiswhereshis.com or <http://www.agr.state.il.us/whereshis/>) and its linked companion webpage "Farmers Market Forum" (<http://www.agr.state.il.us/farmersmarket/>). These two websites are obtaining approximately 1,200 hits a month. These websites are used to reach the consumers interested in Illinois specialty crops as well as reach the

entities involved in specialty crop production and/or sales within the State. One piece of the website is the listing of locations where “Illinois...Where Fresh Is” products which are USDA defined specialty crops that are produced, processed or packaged in Illinois.

	Number Listed
Farmers Markets	564
Road side Stands	381
U-Picks	310
On-farm Sales	608

Information distributed through the educational events are also included on these websites as appropriate.

A blast email database list was generated from available resources containing specialty crop related contact's email addresses. This list is continuously used to contact interested entities regarding time-sensitive information. The list is maintained by the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the Department continues to use it to forward specialty crop related messages as they are received.

Several educational events were conducted under the umbrella of this program (some portions were funded by grant funds and other were supported by in-kind donations):

- Three regional meetings for farmers market vendors and managers (Spring 2009)
 - ◊ Springfield
 - ◊ Mt. Vernon
 - ◊ DeKalb
- Three regional meetings for farmers market vendors and managers (Spring 2009)
- GAP/GHP Training Workshop in conjunction with Illinois Extension—Kankakee (Fall 2009)
- Webinar: “Roadside Advertising in a Digital World” presented by Adeel Ahmed, University of Minnesota Extension (Fall 2009)
- Purchase and distribution of approximately 100 Train-the Trainer GAP/GHP Educational Packets in conjunction with the National GAPs Program at Cornell University
- Centralized meeting at the 2010 annual Specialty Crop, Agritourism and Organic Conference targeting farmers market vendors and local produce production (January 2010)
- Four regional meetings for farmers market vendors and managers (Spring 2010)
 - ◊ Carterville
 - ◊ Urbana
 - ◊ Rockford
 - ◊ Chicago
- Webinar: EBT/LINK Webinar (Fall 2010)
- Large scale conference call for all market representatives
- Periodic and on-going conference calls for informal planning committee

Event topics included, but were not limited to:

- GAP/GHP
- Use of technology and social media to expand marketing opportunities
- Local media and how they can be utilized to improve a specialty crop market's customer base
- EBT LINK/SNAP programs and opportunities
- Food Safety and how it relates to selling specialty crops
- Benefits of organizing an association to represent farmers market vendors and managers
- Educational Presentations and additional information can be found on the Farmers Market Forum website at: <http://www.agr.state.il.us/farmersmarket/>

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Objectives for the educational events included:

1. Better informed farmers market managers, vendors and specialty crop producers
2. Increased access to resources for markets and specialty crop producers
3. Strengthened support from agencies and ability for the market manager and vendors to network with support program representatives
4. Further develop the mailing lists of market managers and establish a database at the Illinois Department of Agriculture for specialty crop producers that are involved in farmers markets which will allow for markets to access potential producers increasing opportunities for vendors
5. Make GAP/GHP training opportunities available to specialty crop producers throughout Illinois

As was mentioned in the previous "Project Approach" section, various educational events were conducted. Several technological tools such as website and blast emails were utilized to expand the reach of these educational messages.

Comparison of Actual Accomplishments to Establish Goals:

1. Better informed farmers market managers, vendors and specialty crop producers

Educational events sponsored by Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funds and in-kind donations reached nearly 600 individuals involved in the specialty crop industry in Illinois. The majority of these represented organizations so that the in-direct reach that resulted from these events was even larger. Education content was also included on the "Illinois...Where Fresh is" (www.illinoiswhereshis.com or <http://www.agr.state.il.us/whereshis/>) and the "Farmers Market Forum" (<http://www.agr.state.il.us/farmersmarket/>) websites to allow for expanded reach on continued availability to those that would utilize the information to improve their business.

2. Increased access to resources for markets and specialty crop producers

In addition to the actual educational events, the content included on the "Illinois...Where Fresh is" (www.illinoiswhereshis.com or <http://www.agr.state.il.us/whereshis/>) and the "Farmers Market Forum" (<http://www.agr.state.il.us/farmersmarket/>) websites, the networking opportunities that have developed for those involved with the specialty crop industry in Illinois have been the most valuable aspect of the program. Direct marketers, including farmers market vendors and managers, now have an informal organizational structure that allows regular communication as a group and individually amongst participants.

3. Strengthened support from agencies and ability for the market manager and vendors to network with support program representatives

As was mentioned in #2 above, the value of the relationships created during the planning and execution of these educational events have been the most important result of this program. The networking opportunities of organizations, organizational representatives and specialty crop individuals was greater than could have been predicted. Relationships between organizations have developed and commitments have been made by many to continue working together to further support growth and increased competitiveness of the specialty crop industry in Illinois. The future continues to look bright for continued growth of this industry due to the efforts that, it appears, will be maintained to plan and execute future educational events.

4. Further develop the mailing lists of market managers and establish a database at the Illinois Department of Agriculture for specialty crop producers that are involved in farmers markets which will allow for markets to access potential producers increasing opportunities for vendors

Database lists of individuals and companies involved in the direct sales of specialty crop products was included on the Illinois Department of Agriculture's specialty crop related webpages including the "Illinois...Where Fresh is" (www.illinoiswhereshis.com or <http://www.agr.state.il.us/whereshis/>) and the "Farmers Market Forum" (<http://www.agr.state.il.us/farmersmarket/>) websites. Content now contains a total of 1,863 listings where Illinois consumers can purchase Illinois specialty crops.

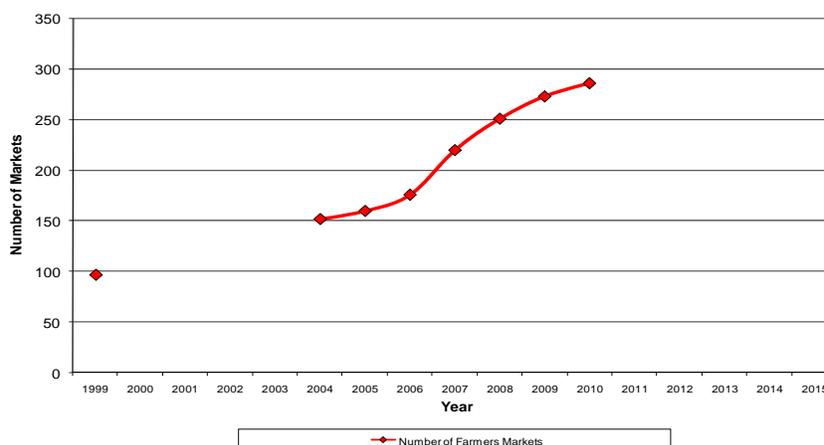
The blast email database, also developed to communicate with specialty crop contacts on a timely fashion, currently contains over 550 contacts that are regularly sent time-sensitive, specialty crop related information.

5. Make GAP/GHP training opportunities available to specialty crop producers throughout Illinois

Approximately 100 Train-the-Trainer GAP/GHP packets were developed for distribution within Illinois in cooperation with the National GAPs Program at Cornell University in conjunction with a training event held in Kankakee, Illinois during the Fall of 2009. Feedback from the training and packet content were extremely positive. The content of the packets were viewed as being extremely valuable tool to distribute to key contacts to allow for information to be distributed as GAP/GHP requirements and programs became increasingly present and involved specialty crop industry participants.

To demonstrate the success of achieving set forth program outcomes, the greatest indicator of success in Illinois would be the change in the number of farmers markets in the State. Market numbers grew during this period of time to place Illinois as the state with the third greatest number of markets (286) in the United States in 2010. From 2008 to 2010, the period of time covered by this series of educational programs, a 14% increase in markets geographically distributed throughout Illinois occurred. This growth created more outlets for specialty crop producers to sell their products, more opportunities for new vendors to enter the market and also allowed existing operations to expand. Bottom line, the Illinois consumer had more specialty crops raised in Illinois to be available for consumption from an increase number of outlets resulting in increased industry competitiveness.

Illinois Farmers Markets



Beneficiaries:

The direct beneficiaries reached by this Specialty Crop Block Grant Program were the vendors, customers and communities of the farmers markets and direct markets in Illinois. The information distributed through these education events benefited the nearly 600 directly involved individuals that participated in the event, the 550 contact on the email distribution database but also the uncounted individuals that viewed the content or had access from the direct participants sharing the details. The number of indirect contacts touched by this information that were not quantitatively reported or were exposed to the indirect results through market changes and improvements would be even greater. Indirectly, this program benefited all of the 273 markets in Illinois in 2009, a dramatic increase from the 90 markets identified in the late 1990's.

Lessons Learned:

The main lesson learned by the grant program manager within the Illinois Department of Agriculture was how positively this program was viewed by the specialty crop industry contacts within Illinois. There was an overwhelming amount of positive comments regarding the educational programs. These events allowed for distribution of information but also created networking situations that were even more important to the specialty crop industry in Illinois. These relationships that developed will impact markets long into the future.

In general all projects were deemed successful by the organizer and participants. Many market managers and vendors were encouraged and excited about the next market season and were going to use the time between seasons for evaluation and planning for the next year's market. Additional events and opportunities are being planned for the future with hopes of expanding numbers of specialty crop participants.

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