

**Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry
(ODAFF)**

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Final Performance Report

April 14, 2011

Grants to Plasticulture Gardens

Project Summary:

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food & Forestry (ODAFF) saw a need in the state of Oklahoma that required a partnership between limited resource farmers and ODAFF. Plasticulture uses farming methods from the past and technology of today to give farmers an easier workload. The main benefits of using the plastic mulch in gardens are the reduction of weeds, protection for plants, and a longer growing season. In 2005, the Plasticulture Program was created and allowed limited resource farmers the ability to enroll up to one (1) acre of land to be used to grow fruits and/or vegetables in plastic.

Potential applicants were required to submit a Plasticulture program application available from the ODAFF. An individual's eligibility was determined based on Langston University's definition of a limited resource farmer being defined as a person with a direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than \$100,000 in each of the previous two years and has received little or no assistance from the government. It was also limited to participants with forty (40) acres or less.

Project Approach:

The Plasticulture Program became a method used to promote the growth of specialty crops in Oklahoma. After individuals were accepted into the plasticulture program, ODAFF assisted in the installation of up to one (1) acre of plasticulture, which included plastic mulch, drip tape irrigation and fertigation system. Nineteen producers were funded in the ODAFF's plasticulture gardens project. Funds were used to purchase up to \$600 in plant materials, fertilizer, seed, irrigation supplies, plastic, land preparation, animal depredation and wildlife fencing for these gardens. Prior to funds being released individuals were required to provide receipts for all approved expenditures.

In Oklahoma the timing for garden installation is fairly narrow with late freezes and early rains. In order to alleviate some of these issues, the ODAFF hired 4 contractors to assist in the laying of the plastic mulch. The 19 participants were divided out between the contractors according to their geographic locations.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The Plasticulture Program was designed to help limited resource farmers get their produce to consumers in Oklahoma and to be a boost to farmers already producing specialty crops by increasing their production by using more efficient production methods. Through the program, both the consumer and the seller benefit in the process. Not only have the small farming operations benefited financially from the increased production of specialty crops, but the local communities surrounding these farms now have access to fresh locally grown produce. As the number of Farmers Markets continues to grow statewide the need for vendors providing fresh fruits and vegetables increases and participants in the plasticulture program are able to meet their needs. The Farm to School program is also providing growers another viable market for their

specialty crops and many are working with schools to grow specific items that can be easily incorporated into the meals.

The Plasticulture Program participants have grown several crops that grow through every season including, asparagus, beets, blackberries, blueberries, butternut squash, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, greens (collard, mustard, turnip), herbs, kohlrabi, melon (honey dew, watermelon, cantaloupe) okra, onions (purple, yellow, white), peppers (bell, cayenne, habanero, jalapeño), pinto beans, potatoes (red, sweet, white), peas (black eyed, English, purple hull), scallions, squash, spinach, tomatoes, and turnips.

Beneficiaries:

The Plasticulture Program has worked with several schools and low income areas across the state to establish demonstration gardens. With many children now being 2 to 3 generations removed from the farm; the gardens educate how their food is grown and how easy it is to grow a small garden. Children are able to learn at an early age the benefits of eating fresh healthy vegetables and not develop the negative stereotype of vegetables that come from a can. Demonstration gardens have also been established in low income communities and provide nourishment as well as learning opportunities. These community and school gardens are not-for-profit organizations that set up a U-Pick type garden for those interested in the produce, and serve as models for regionally and statewide community agribusinesses.

Oklahoma ranks as one of the highest states when it comes to childhood obesity. Several Plasticulture growers provide produce for the Farm to School program, which is dedicated to providing fresh and local fruits and vegetables to schools across the state. Grants have been set up by the state for the sole purpose of purchasing locally grown fruits and vegetables for public schools. Since 2007, 17 Plasticulture farmers are actively participating in the Farm to School Program. The farmers benefit monetarily, but they also have the satisfaction of knowing they are helping students eat locally grown fruits and vegetables which is essential to a healthy diet.

Ron and Margaret Cook had plastic laid in a ¼ acre plot. The garden produced over 2,000 pounds in vegetables. He sold at the Tahlequah Farmer's Market, Reasor's supermarket, Oasis Health Food Store, Burgess Fruit Market, Restaurant of the Cherokees, South Side Drive-In, Town Branch Bar and Grill, Village Café, Out West Café, K.C. Harris Burgers, and Iguana Café. Ron Cook states he has a steady stream of faithful customers who call or write to order their registered organic produce. During the later summer months in Oklahoma when the temperature reaches 100 degrees daily the plastic protected the plants from the scorching heat and Cook would have produce to sell while others using conventional methods had no produce for market.

Lessons Learned:

Farming is all about trial and error. Most, if not all, successful farmers have gone through several methods and growing seasons before finding a system that works for them. Plasticulture is no different. Many of our participants found extra benefits with the plastic by trying different methods in the rows of plastic in one season. The program is guaranteed for three seasons to participants who comply with the rules of the program. Using the first year to test different

methods is an excellent way to determine what works with plastic and what does not. The following are some methods that turned out successful for some of the participants.

July is not the typical time in Oklahoma when a person would think about planting a garden as there is little rain and temperatures constantly reach the century mark. Using the plasticulture system a demonstration garden was planted with sweet corn, squash, okra, tomatoes, purple hull peas, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, and watermelon. The plastic's ability to hold water and moisture allowed the plants to thrive in the midst of the unfavorable growing conditions and showed how using the plastic can extend a persons growing season well into the fall.

Rochelle King, of Spencer saw the three feet of plastic as a way to double her potential yield by planting on both sides of the plastic. She was the first to plant purple hull peas on two sides of the plastic and carefully plant okra down the center of the row near the drip tape. What was usually grown in three different rows was now put in one, and worked successfully. Peas give extra nitrogen to the soil, which okra needs to grow in the heat of the months of July and August. Many farmers adopted her method after hearing about it, and the Plasticulture Program encourages this method for those who want as much production as possible.

Tips like the ones listed above have been used by several farmers after introduced in conferences and through word of mouth. Other farmers wrote seemingly small, but helpful tips in their production reports turned in at the end of the season. "Do successive planting instead of planting everything at the same time, have more markets lined out than you think you'll need, a cool room would be of benefit."

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Additional Information:

Thank You Letter from a Plasticulture Participant:

"Using the plastic, along with drip tape is wonderful. It was easier to control so many variables in the growing process: water, weeds, nutrients, etc. The program helped us to learn so much in production and marketing of crops. Thank you very much for all your help, training, and funding." –Daniel and Judith Lamb

Advertising Campaign

Project Summary:

The promotion of farmers markets is essential to the growth and sustainability of the Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets. A statewide advertising campaign using different types of media made

it possible to promote all the farmers markets across the state. Through advertising and other promotional programs, we increased availability, production and demand for Oklahoma's specialty crops. By coupling new programs with already proven programs, we continued to increase demand and production of these products.

Project Approach:

The advertising campaign was designed to increase awareness of 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Markets. The advertising campaign ran from May to October in 2009, and from May to September in 2010. Half page ad space was purchased in Oklahoma Living, a rural electric cooperative monthly publication that has a monthly subscription of 315,000 with a monthly readership of 650,000. Seven months of advertising were purchased using grant funds with an additional two months purchased using matching state funds. The ads supported the following non inclusive list of specialty crops grown and sold at Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets across the state...

Tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, onions, garlic, leafy greens, okra, sweet corn, watermelon, cantaloupe, honey dew, pepper, egg plant, green beans, peas, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, herbs, cut flowers, pumpkins, radishes, strawberries, turnips, peaches, apples, grapes, plums, pears, blackberries, blueberries, and probably others I have failed to mention. An electronic scan of the ad has been included below for your review.

It's Fresh. It's Local.

Buy from your local farmers' market!

Interested in buying or selling at your local farmers' market...visit www.okgrown.com for more information.

Buy Oklahoma Grown

These markets are 100% Oklahoma Grown.

Ok Grown
www.okgrown.com

Ada • May through November
 Anadarko • June through September
 Ardmore • Year Round
 Bartlesville • May through October
 Blanchard • May through October
 Broken Arrow • April 16 through Oct 17
 Chickasha • May through October
 Choctaw • June through October
 Cleveland • June through October
 Collinsville • June through October
 Crescent • June through Labor Day
 Cushing • June through September
 Duncan • June through October
 El Reno • June through September
 Enid • May through August
 Eufaula • May through September
 Guthrie • May through September
 Hobart • June through September
 Jenks • May through October
 Kingfisher • June through August
 Kingston • May through August
 Lawton • May through October
 Mangum • June through August
 McAlester • May through November
 Midwest City • May through October
 Moore • May through August
 Muskogee • April 19 through October
 Noble • May through October
 Nowata • May through October
 Oklahoma City-OSU/OKC • Year Round
 Oklahoma City-Community Farmers Market • June through October
 Okmulgee • April through October
 Owasso • May through mid-October
 Piedmont • June 7 through August
 Ponca City • May through October
 Pryor • May through October
 Sallisaw • April through October
 Sayre • June through October
 Seminole • June through October
 Shawnee • Mid-April through October
 Skiatook • May through October
 Stillwater • Year Round
 Stilwell • April through October
 Tahlequah • May through October
 Tahlequah • May through October
 Talihina • June through October
 Tishomingo • May through October
 Tulsa-Downtown • May through October
 Tulsa-Pearl District • April 23 through Sept 15
 Tulsa-Cherry Street • May through October
 Tulsa-North • June through October
 Tuttle • May through August
 Valliant • June through August
 Weatherford • May through October
 Wilburton • June through October
 Woodward • May 30 through October 31
 Yukon • June through October

In addition to the print advertising, we secured radio advertising during the summer of 2010 with 5 radio channels. Bids were evaluated and selected based on a committee's recommendation. The committee selected a range of radio stations spread across the state to try and promote all available markets. These radio ads complemented the print ads by reaching out to listeners and encouraging them to purchase fresh, locally grown produce at their local Oklahoma Grown Farmers Market. It spoke about the types of produce available, and introduced them to the Okgrown.com website to find their nearest Oklahoma Grown Farmers Market.

The Oklahoma Proven program is a plant evaluation and marketing program designed to help consumers select the best plants for Oklahoma gardens. The goal has been to select plants that are tolerant of the varied and difficult environmental conditions found throughout Oklahoma since using well-adapted plants should lead to greater gardening success. Selections are made annually in four different categories: tree, shrub, perennial and annual ornamental. A booklet was printed showing all of the selections in the 4 categories of the Oklahoma Proven program since its inception in 1999. The booklets were distributed to local nurseries that actively participate in the Oklahoma Proven program by caring these selections for their customers to purchase.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets were able to gain access to the 315,000 rural Oklahoma families receiving the Oklahoma Living publication on a monthly basis. Many people in rural areas find themselves too busy to have a garden but still want access to fresh fruits and vegetables and do not want to buy them from the grocery store. The half page ads were colorful as well as eye-catching and gave the consumers a list of the markets and when the markets began and ended their seasons. Many markets received additional free publicity by their local electric cooperatives doing stories in their monthly newsletters.

Nurseries are notified a year in advance of the Oklahoma Proven selections in order for them to build their inventories for the increased demand for the selections the following year. As the popularity of the program continues to increase, nurseries find it hard to meet the demand for the current year's selections. The booklet has been a great tool for consumers to use to see selections from previous years and their ideal growing conditions. Feedback has been positive about the booklet as sales of prior year's selections have picked up since the distribution.

Beneficiaries:

Both producers and consumers benefited from the advertising campaigns. Over 56 Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets along with their local producers gained increased exposure due to the advertising. Countless local consumers were also led to fresh locally grown specialty crops as a result of the campaigns.

Lessons Learned:

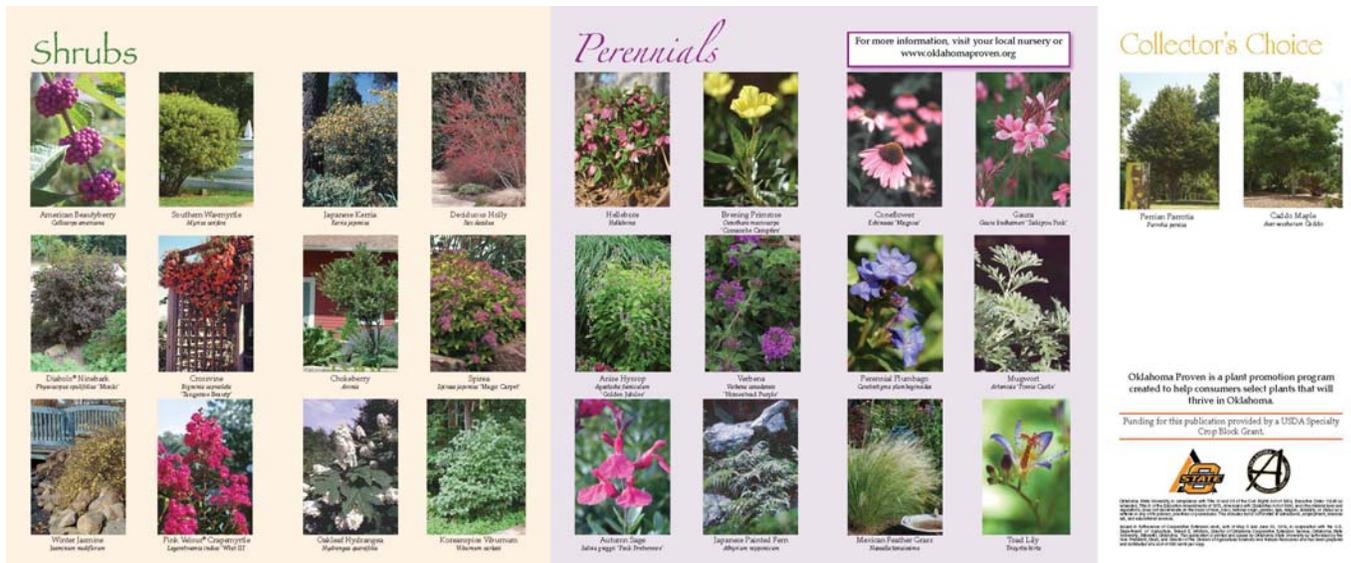
Many of the Farmers Markets in the state have limited promotional budgets to conduct advertising. These funds tend to be spent early in the market season to help generate buzz about the markets being open. A perceived problem with this project was a delay in securing the radio advertising that would have taken place during the early market season. The delay caused ads to run during August; a time in Oklahoma when attendance generally declines. With the ads running; market managers said that attendance seemed to increase compared to the same periods in previous years. As the weather starts to warm up and the first fruits and vegetables of the year are available at local Farmers Markets, the consumers are excited about coming to the market and purchase items weekly. But as the summer wears on with its 100 degree temperatures the consumers thinks that there will be a lack of fresh produce at the markets, which is certainly not the case and markets are starting putting more efforts and dollars into marketing mid to late season rather than everything at the beginning

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Additional Information:





Grants

Project Summary:

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry administrated competitive grants of up to \$2,500 to 35 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Markets. Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Market managers are constantly looking for ways to increase demand for farmers' markets. By offering grants, we were able to help managers continue to build and expand their markets through signage, promotional marketing items, advertising, newsletter publishing, structures (tents), and other promotional items. There has been an increase in farmers' markets selling only Oklahoma Grown produce during the last few years. In 2005, there were 20 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Markets in 2009 there were over 47 markets selling 100 percent Oklahoma Grown produce. The goal is to continue the increase of retail outlets for Oklahoma specialty crop producers by assisting Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Markets with grant money for promotion. 2009 was the third year that SCBG funds were used to give grants to 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets. Grant funds have helped new markets to become established and to grow faster and helped older markets to sustain growth and reach new customers through new advertising strategies.

Project Approach:

The goal of this project was to assist farmers' market managers in increasing demand by building and expanding their markets through signage, promotional marketing items, advertising, newsletter publishing, structures (canopies), and other promotional items. To accomplish this goal, the project proposed awarding grants to 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Markets to be used for advertising, promotion and displays. Of our 47 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmer Markets, 35 were awarded grants. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture decided that it would be best if markets that were older and more established should be eligible for up to a \$2,500 grant and newer markets would be eligible for grants of up to \$1,500, based on the

premise that Oklahoma's new markets are smaller and would not need as much advertising to sufficiently market their products. The difference between older and new markets would be those that have been registered with the state for more than three years. Of the 35 markets that received grant funds in 2009 all but four are still operating and growing. This is very good when compared to national averages.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Farmers markets that wished to receive grants had to be a registered 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Market, have a minimum of 6 vendors and fill out a competitive grant application. Markets that were awarded grants were then required to submit a final report at the end of the grant period. Final reports included a written summary of grant activities and documentation of all purchases made. Audits were then performed on all final reports to ensure that all grant monies were spent on appropriate activities. Any grant funds that were not spent during the grant period or were not spent on approved projects were reimbursed to ODAFF. The goal of this project was to grow the number of specialty crop producers in the state, grow the sales of specialty crops and also to grow the number of locations where these specialty crop producers can sell their premium products for a premium price. Over the past 4 years the number of specialty crop producers selling at 100% Oklahoma Grown farmers markets has increased by over 300%. In 2006 it was documented that just over 200 specialty crop producers were selling at 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets. This past season almost 1,000 specialty crop producers were recorded selling at these markets. Over the past four years sales at 100% Oklahoma have gone from nearly \$900,000 to well over \$3 million. The number of farmers markets where Oklahoma specialty crop producers can market their products have also seen a marked increase from 20 in 2005 to over 47 in 2009 this is a 135% increase in the number of 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets.

Beneficiaries:

There were many direct beneficiaries and many more indirect beneficiaries. The direct beneficiaries included the over 500 specialty crop producers that sell at the 35 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers Markets that received grants. The indirect beneficiaries would include all consumers that shop at these markets. Many of the 35 markets are in small rural communities that have limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Lessons Learned:

The only issue that we encountered with the grant program was when we conducted an audit of the final reports submitted by the farmers markets. This audit was done two years after the grant period ended. There were no issues that could not be resolved however the process would have gone much smoother if the audit would have been done soon after the grant period ended. We have learned from this and an audit for the 2010 grant period which ended December 31 has already started.

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Additional Information:

Urban Renewal

Project Summary:

As part of an urban renewal project in Downtown Oklahoma City we planned to work with Oklahoma State University and Downtown Oklahoma City to improve the 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Market. This market was being located in an area where a large number of people work to help both producers of specialty crops and consumers by offering another outlet to sell and buy high quality, fresh and locally grown produce. In this area of Oklahoma City, there is limited access to fresh produce. We hoped by promoting this large 100% Oklahoma Grown Farmers' Market, we would offer healthier options to people who live and work in downtown Oklahoma City. This could also help revive an area of downtown Oklahoma City by drawing more consumers into the area. It has been the goal of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry to establish this market so that it could be self supporting. This market was started in 2007 and had gross sales of \$24,447.25 and 18 vendors participate. In 2008, the market had gross sales of \$63,415.73 and 21 vendors participate.

By continuing to improve a large 100% Oklahoma Grow Farmers' Market in Downtown Oklahoma City, we would be giving producers a large retail outlet to market their produce. It is estimated that during the times of operation of the Oklahoma State University/Oklahoma City Downtown Farmers' Market, over 59,000 individuals are working in Downtown Oklahoma City. The goal was to have 25 specialty crop producers selling high quality, fresh fruits and vegetables. We would be creating a large demand for producers by offering healthier alternatives to the citizens of Downtown Oklahoma City.

Soon after this project was approved within the State Plan, the downtown market closed its current operation. It then moved to another location that had a corporate sponsor and this project became invalid. Of the \$5,000 budgeted for this project, \$929.37 was moved to the "Advertising Campaign" project while the remaining \$4070.63 was moved into the "Grants" project.

Project Approach:

N/A due to project being stopped.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

N/A

Beneficiaries:

N/A

Lessons Learned:

N/A

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N/A