

Downtown Aberdeen Farmers Market

Aberdeen Downtown Association of Aberdeen, South Dakota received \$10,000 to solicit new vendors for the Downtown Aberdeen Farmers Market through a multi-media advertising campaign. Funds were used to research new vendors, solicit vendors through radio, Internet, newspapers, flyers, and posters; and to purchase promotional materials for the market.

Final Report

G-0750 Final Report

• Project Summary.

The Downtown Aberdeen Farmer's Market (DAFM) has been in operation since June of 2004. The Farmer's Market has seen only marginal success in both recruiting vendors and in raising community awareness and interest.

• Project Approach.

To increase foot traffic and downtown participation, the location of the Downtown Aberdeen Farmer's Market (DAFM) moved its location from a downtown parking lot with considerable traffic to two corners on Main Street. The parking lot location had not seen success in the past. On Main Street, downtown businesses were encouraged to extend business hours and/or participate in the Farmer's Market by selling approved items from their store. The DAFM was also hopeful that vendors would see an increase of customers by selling produce and goods on a sidewalk rather than from a parking lot.

To increase community participation, the market day and time changed from Saturday mornings (when consumers are out of town) to Thursday afternoons from 4-7 pm. In addition, a theme day was created for each session of the Farmer's Market. For example, "Chef's Day" encouraged vendors to share favorite recipes using market produce with customers. To encourage purchases from multiple vendors, the DAFM sold canvas reusable bags.

Because of availability of produce, the Farmer's Market would begin June 4th and continue to October 1st, weather permitting in October. The DAFM placed a large amount of its focus to reach consumers by using local advertising mechanisms including weekly newspaper ads, posters, and Facebook. Two large pull-up banners were purchased and were placed in two downtown stores that see our target consumers the most.

The largest hurdle for the DAFM was finding an acceptable number of vendors to garner community interest. The DAFM addressed this in multiple ways. The Farmer's Market did not charge a vendor fee due to the grant. The market manager worked with the Natural Abundance Food-Coop store, which is located on Main Street. Natural Abundance shared a list of approximately one hundred local gardeners and/or possible vendors. Letters were mailed to potential vendors inviting them to participate, and a brochure and application were sent via email if the vendor's email address was known. The market manager followed up each contact with a phone call and sent a Farmer's Market packet to vendors who showed an interested or planned to participate.

The DAFM also expanded its acceptable products for sale by vendors. We went from only allowing fresh produce and baked goods to including handcrafted

items; made or grown by the 'farmer' such as furniture, canned goods, plants, crafts, and jewelry.

• **Goals, Outputs, and Outcomes Achieved.**

Moving the location to Main Street to increase business participation was partially successful. Even though downtown businesses did not participate in the Farmer's Market, they showed enthusiasm about it being on Main Street and helped promote it by placing signs and flyers in their windows.

Due to the increase in vendors, the DAFM believes changing to Thursday afternoon continuing to early evening from Saturday morning improved vendor response and participation. We also had a few complaints about it not being on Saturday mornings, but the positive comments far outweighed the negative. The idea for theme day never captured the interest of the vendors and disappeared.

The DAFM did see an increase in vendor interest in response to the free venue and the enhanced variety of items and product offerings allowed. The DAFM saw an increase of business presence outside of downtown, including those from out of town. In addition, the vendors increased their types of products offered for sale. For example, one vendor listed garden produce, crafts, baked goods, and flowers as items for sale on their application.

In response to the massive advertising campaign to garner interest conducted through press releases, letters, email, and phone calls, the DAFM did experience an increase in interest and participation. DAFM had eighteen vendors in 2009 where only two attended in 2008. Visitor attendance also increased by 35% over all.

• **Beneficiaries.**

Beneficiaries of the DAFM are beyond just the vendors realizing the economic benefits, and the patrons recognizing the benefits of obtaining products. The community of Aberdeen and its surrounding area are also beneficiaries. It is an educational experience, for it allows people the chance to interact with vendors and learn about the process they go through. It encourages people to get involved in creating their own original products for they know there will be a venue to sell their products. In addition, it gives a way for people to get involved in entrepreneurship, and builds a stronger sense of community spirit.

• **Lessons Learned.**

We experienced many changes throughout the season. Most were positive and the ultimate goal was to increase vendors. Changing the day and time and allowing a larger variety of products was beneficial to our success. Offering vendors a space free of charge to promote and sell their produce and products is critical to having a successful Farmer's Market. Multi-media marketing and a

constant feed of information to the public attract a successful amount of consumers for the vendors. Also critical to the success of the DAFM was the market manager's effort to contact a large number of potential vendors and follow up with them by personal contact or a phone call.

- **Additional information.**

The DAFM partnered with Buy Fresh Buy Local SD and the Natural Abundance Food-Coop. We stayed with a consistent message in all advertising. News publications included the *Midland Shopper*, Facebook (Aberdeen Downtown Farmer's Market), and news releases to the *Aberdeen American News*. Placing posters and signs throughout the community in addition to the pull-up banners, advertising the Farmer's Market increased participation and turnout.



Pull-Up Banner

- **Contact person.**

Georgia Smith / 605.226.3441 / events@aberdeendowntown.org