

The **Vermillion Area Farmers Market** of Vermillion, SD, received **\$51,142** that increased consumption of fresh, local foods by area residents by expanding the market; educating vendors and consumers; creating community kitchens for both vendors and consumers; and promoting the existing EBT program at the market.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Performance Report

Date: October 30, 2012

Recipient Name: Amy Schweinle and Grace Freeman

Title of Project: Grow Smart/Shop Smart: Growing Farmers and Consumers Through Education and Expansion

Grant Number: 12-25-G-1195

Location: Vermillion, South Dakota

Project Summary:

The Vermillion Area Farmers Market was fortunate to receive a marketing promotions grant October 2010. Financial support was needed in order to build the market and the good it could do in the community. The intention of the grant was to increase the numbers of vendors selling healthy, locally grown foods and increase access to healthy, locally grown food, for the community. The market started out small and had some good quality vendors but lacked the resources to advertise, increase its visibility to the public, attract new vendors and increase the customer base. Amy Schweinle and Grace Freeman have been with the VAFM for eight years and sought to build the market through applying for this grant.

Project Approach:

Their approach was to work within the Vermillion community infrastructure to build and promote our local farmers market. The grant they wrote sought to do the following:

- Outfit two community kitchens with cooking and food preparation equipment to process food for sale at the market as well as add a community venue for other local activities.
- Set up the market with tents, chairs, hand washing station, cooking station, signs and storage building to expand the capabilities and visibility of the market.
- Provide market education at the weekly market on preparing foods from locally grown sources, and a variety of topics related to local foods.
- Provide vendor education on how to grow, harvest, safely handle, process, label and market foods for the farmers market.
- Increase the number of vendors selling at the market.
- Increase the number of customers buying at the market and the quantity of items sold at the market.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

Many goals were met through the grant. The following is only a partial list of the good outcomes that came from the grant:

1. Advertising was possible through grant funds for street signs, posters, newspaper advertisements and a monthly column, newsletters, magnets, market shirts and market bags, coupons, green pennies, gift certificates, calendars, garden planners, radio, pamphlets, brochures and social media such as email and QR code leading to our Facebook page. A survey taken during the grant period suggested that the most noticed publicity were the email reminders and Facebook page, newspaper advertisements and monthly column, magnets and posters. This is good news for the ongoing success of the market.
2. Market education to customers was seen as fairly successful. The most attended were cooking demonstration with locally produced items. We offered a huge variety of market education from composting, building compost bins, seed sharing, transplanting seedlings, harvesting and canning, bread making, egg production, harvesting honey, beer making, and barbecuing, international cooking, care of cookware, and cooking in cast iron. It was wonderful to have the funding to set up a market education tent, hand washing and cooking station, chairs, and signs and cooking utensils. We used it at every market in the summer. We were also able to pay a market educator for both summers.

Vendor education was carried out primarily after the winter markets closed for the day in the winters of 2011 and 2012. Topics varied such as safe food handling, canning, packaging and labeling, planning your garden, early planting using row covers, transplanting, care of bees to produce honey, tapping trees to make maple syrup, raising chicks for egg production, early harvest of salad greens and herbs, and finding a niche at the market. We surveyed vendors as to what they like about the market, and what could be done to support and attract more vendors. They indicated that they enjoyed the relationship with other vendors and with their regular customers. They wanted more exposure to profiling the vendors in the newspaper columns (which we later did for our regular vendors). Also they wanted to increase the number of students from USD visiting the market and selling as vendors. We put up posters and advertised in the University newspaper to increase student customers. Vendors indicated in a survey given that word of mouth was one of the best ways to attract more vendors. Currently we offer a phone number and contact person on all our advertising for interested vendors. We also keep our market fees very low to attract new vendors. We have been able to do this in part because of the grant.

3. Support of the grant allowed for continuous offering of EBT/Debit sales. Being able to hire a market manager to offer this service to customers and vendors was a good thing for growth of the market. We were able to track market sales through this which I will summarize in a following section.
4. Through the support of the grant we were able to set up two community kitchens with commercial oven, professional grade mixer, pots and pans, utensils, and cooking island. We had two community demonstrations and two harvest dinners using the community kitchens.
5. We had an increase in market sales as tracked by EBT/Debit sales:

Summer 2010 we sold \$1,634.71 through EBT/Debit sales.

Summer 2011 we sold \$4,628.23 through EBT/Debit sales.

Summer 2012 we sold \$3,577.20 through EBT or Debit sales, however, the summer season has not yet ended. According to our most recent survey, only 16% of customers pay with debit and 5% pay with EBT. So, this estimate may only represent 21% of market sales. We do not have information on how much is sold in cash sales but informal questioning suggests vendors make quite a bit more through cash payment.

6. We increased the number of vendors selling at the market:

Summer 2009 before the grant – 26 vendors

Summer 2010 before the grant – 34 vendors

Summer 2011 during the grant – 32 vendors

Summer 2012 during the grant – 41 vendors

In the two winter markets we had with the support of the grant, we went from 20 to 23 vendors. Overall the variety of products sold by vendors was truly astounding from our biggest sales in produce, to bakery, meat and eggs, ready to cook pasta, canned goods of all kinds, homemade sweets, honey, fresh cut flowers, plants, pet treats, soap, tie dye clothes, baby clothes, handmade books, crafts, knife sharpening, wood carvings, glass art, card art and more.

Beneficiaries:

There have been many beneficiaries in the community with this grant. First, individuals organizing the market were involved with the grant and have learned how to work with a federal grant and watched firsthand the growth of the market. Vendors have benefited from having a regular place to sell their goods and increased sales due to the grant. They have benefited from

the advertising and organization that was done for them, rather than having to do that individually. They benefitted from having electronic funds transfer service paid for them and having an area reserved for their use each week. Vendors were interviewed and commented that they have seen more customers and increased sales this season. One bread baker had to increase his production to keep up with the increased demand. Vegetable growers routinely sold out of weekly vegetables due to increased sales. We have been able to attract a greater number of different kinds of vendors also due to the grant advertising. [In 2012](#) in addition to the variety of regular vendors we added vendors selling jewelry, blown glass, pastries, photography, cookbooks, and lumber.

Customers have benefited from having more products and vendors to purchase goods from and from the weekly market education offered in the summer. Our email advertising what will be at the next market, goes out to 194 customers We know from a survey given out that the average customer is 43, range of 21 to 82 years old. More customers are female (57%) than male (43%). Many have a college education (100% of respondents). Some have attended the market up to nine years, the average was three years. Some drive as far as 30 miles to come to the market. Overall customers indicated that they were very happy with the market, especially the number of vendors, the quality and variety of goods. Comments in the survey were very complimentary about the freshness of products and the variety of goods available. They also indicated they were happy with the management and organization of the market, the dates and times and advertising. Customers said they typically spend about 22 dollars a week at the market. Most of the purchases are paid by cash or check (79%) But 21 percent do take advantage of the Debit/EBT/SNAP service that the market offers. The chart below shows what customers purchased while at the market.

Category of Purchase	Percent of Respondents
Fruits or Vegetables	95
Baked Goods	89
Eggs	43
Jams, Jellies, Honey or Preserves	41
Meat, Poultry,	41
Flowers and Herbs	11
Clothing, Soap, or Crafts	3

Many local businesses have benefited from the grant in Vermillion and surrounding area. Our Parks and Recreation Department and local coop gained a workable kitchen for producing local goods. We purchased as much of our equipment from local businesses as possible. All of our \$6,000 dollars in advertising went to local businesses. We worked with other organizations such as Vermillion Now to offer free low tunnels to vendors. It's been a good opportunity for local businesses to take part in an activity that encourages the community to eat healthy and buy local.

Individuals have benefited both from providing market education as well as customers in partaking in it. Market educators have had the chance to share their expertise or hobby with others. Most said it was an enjoyable experience. Up to 70 percent of customers said they have attended a session and were satisfied or very satisfied with it. They thought the time the education is offered (4 to 5:00 pm) Thursday afternoons was good and the topics provided were satisfactory. Customers thought the overall quality of the market education was even better the second year.

Lessons Learned:

The grant has helped the Vermillion Area Farmers Market grow a presence in the community and deliver healthy, fresh, local foods to customers. It helped us make purchases to set up market education and pay for a market manager. The advertising we could do to promote the market was a big bonus. The grant helped grow our market with increased number of vendors and sales. We were able to implement many creative ideas in market education. This said, sometimes it was difficult to sort out who would do what in the organization. We found we needed help with the accounting part of the grant. We found expertise that helped us in that area. Another lesson learned was that social media such as email and Facebook available now are good ways to gain customers and facilitate customer relations. One of our challenges was how the grant money was provided. Up front money would have been better than the current reimbursement system used in the grant. The notebook provided shows examples of markets requesting as much as \$22,000 dollars for a reimbursement. A small market like ours could never sustain that kind of debt and carry it for months without credit issues. Regular, quarterly installments would have helped us enormously with the finances in the grant.

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