

**Building Capacity of the Johnson County Farmers Market for Vendors and Customers:
New EBT Project**

Appalachian Native Plants of Mountain City, Tennessee received \$32,320 to strengthen and promote the new Johnson County Farmers Market. Funds were used to promote the market, provide EBT equipment and host four vendor workshops

[Final Report FY09](#)

Performance (Final) Report

December 28, 2011

Recipient Name: Appalachian Native Plants/Johnson County Farmers Market (JCFM)

Title of Project: Building the Capacity for the Johnson County Farmers Market for Vendors and Customers: New EBT Project

Grant Number: 12-25-G-0978

Location: Mountain City, TN

Contact Name/Telephone Number: Tamara McNaughton, (423)727-2791

Progress Report: #5 - Final

ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES:

Advertising:

A multifaceted marketing campaign began in January 2010 and continued through the course of the grant period. Webpage and facebook pages were created. The JCFM is also posted on the Appalachian Farmers Market Association (AppFMA) webpage, localharvest.org, buyappalachian.org, PickTN products, Realtime Farmers, Google maps, and other online listings. 2010 and 2011 advertising in local newspapers and were at least a 200% increase from the 2009 season. For the 2010 and 2011 seasons we ran weekly ads in the local digital paper, 10 – 2x5” ads and weekly announcements in the community calendar throughout the summer in the local print paper, and one month of ads 3 times per day on the local radio station. We found the local radio ads 3 times a day, 6 days a week to be the most enjoyed advertising strategy by vendors and customers. We highlighted our vendors by putting their voices on the radio throughout the summer. Business cards and rack cards were printed for distribution. Additional road side signs were made each year for JCFM. 8 articles were written for the local newspapers that ran these stories quarterly.

We target the entire population of Johnson County and surrounding areas while paying specific attention to low-income members of our community. Flyers were distributed through food pantries and other service providers such as DHS and the Health Department to promote the availability of EBT at the market.

Through surveying of customers we found the road side signs to be the most common way people learned about the market. We were able to acquire “Farmers Market Today” directional signage through the TN Ag Enhancement Project. These signs had a great impact with many new customers saying things to the effect of “I saw the signs and came in”. We expect word of mouth promotions to continue increasing in 2012.

EBT Technology:

Our EBT machine was fully functional for the entire season. 23 vendors were trained in the use of the EBT system. 15 vendors redeemed EBT tokens. \$3474.50 EBT tokens were redeemed for fresh foods at the market over the course of the 2011 season. This includes \$2144.75 of direct food stamp monies and \$1329.75 in double dollar funds from Wholesome Wave Foundation. Direct food stamp monies increased \$775 in 2011 from

2010. 56 EBT customers used our machine in 2010 and there were 25 new EBT customers in 2011. A total of 232 EBT transactions were made in 2010 and 2011. The majority of our EBT customers are from Johnson County although there were a handful of customers from NC and one from OH. EBT sales picked up tremendously during the peak season in August when EBT customers were seen purchasing bushels of tomatoes, beans, and corn to preserve for the winter. As word continues to spread on the availability of EBT at our market, we foresee these sales continue to increase in years to come.

Our machine was not working for our Holiday Market at the end of the 2010 season. Efforts to correct the machine took two months of discussion with various representatives from Merchant Source, Total Merchant Services, and TASQ. Total Merchant Services was finally able to make this right for us and a new machine was secured for the 2011 season.

Producers:

We asked vendors to begin reporting their income to us in July. An average of 7 vendors attended our market (Saturdays and Tuesdays) since the beginning of July. On Saturdays there were 9 or 10. Tuesday markets had 2 consistent vendors. Together these vendors have generated nearly \$19,000 income from the beginning of July to the end of September. This is a \$4000 increase from 2010. Had we asked vendors to report income at the beginning of the season in May, the gross income would be a higher number.

Customers and vendors filled out surveys in 2009 and 2010. Comments from customers responding to “What do you like least about this market?” indicate that more vendors are needed at our market with statements like, “needs more farmers here”. “Friendly vendors” was the most common response to “What do you like best about this market”. Every customer who filled out a survey “strongly agreed” that they “feel better about where their food comes from”. Vendor surveys showed that all except one vendor are producers that grow 100% of what they sell. One vendor purchases product for resale. All except 3 vendors are part-time farmers whose income from farming is 50% or less of their total income. Two vendors are employed full time in farming. Vendors echoed customer responses in that they feel the market needs more customer traffic. When asked “what do you like best about selling at this market”, they like networking with other growers and meeting new people through the market. Some also feel the market needs additional vendors to help draw customers.

Educational Workshops and Events:

4 educational workshops were hosted during this grant cycle: 10 in attendance at Season Extension Techniques, 15 in attendance at Certified Domestic Kitchen Course, 15 in attendance at Food Safety/Good Agricultural Practices, and 6 in attendance at Organic Production and Appalachian Harvest. These workshops acted as a way to continue engaging with vendors through the off season.

Monthly (5) educational events have been hosted over the course of the two seasons and included such topics as: Mother’s Day; Good Bugs, Bag Bugs, and Bug Out Bags; Food Independence Day; 3rd Tomato/Bean Fest; and a Health Fair. All of these events

provided educational materials to the public. We also had community members set up educational booths and provide samples and information on things like green drinks and disaster preparedness. Suggestions on ways to get involved in strengthening the food economy and food security have been offered and talked about over the course of the season.

Establishing Market:

The mission of the Johnson County Farmers Market is to *help strengthen a sustainable local agricultural and food economy*. In December 2009 the Johnson County Farmers Market began the process of establishing itself as an independent non-profit organization. We received our Employer Identification Number, Charter from the Secretary of State, and registered as a non-profit organization in the state of TN. We received our DUNS number and registered with CCR. Application was submitted to the Internal Revenue Service requesting designation as a non-profit organization in January 2010. We received our letter of designation as a 501(c)(3) non profit organization in February 2011.

PROBLEMS AND DELAYS:

Appalachian Native Plants, Inc decided to disengage itself from the Farmers Market at the outset of the grant cycle. This separation of organizations caused small delays in Farmers Market programs during this transition and was fortunately during the off season.

Our EBT machine had to be sent back to the manufacturer twice during the month of May 2010 due to encryption issues. The machine became fully functional on June 12th. This caused a loss of sales and some difficulty in getting the word out about the availability of EBT at our market at the onset.

FUTURE PROJECT PLANS:

We will continue to grow the Johnson County Farmers Market through promotions, community outreach and education, and vendor trainings. A grant proposal has been submitted to Appalachian Community Fund. This project, if funded, will provide monthly community gatherings focused on food security and food justice.

Our landlord began charging \$200 per month rent for the 2011 season. In response to increased rent, the Sierra Club members hosted a bake sale at the market to raise additional funds to cover rent costs. \$405 was raised through this sale. We have been grateful to receive our first 2 years at \$1 per year were alright with paying rent for this season. We are, however, moving to a new location for 2011 where we will again be charged \$1 per year. We simply can not continue to pay such a high rental fee. Our new location is close to downtown Mountain City and is visible from a high traffic four lane road. We are excited by this new location and new partnership we will be building with First Christian Church.

We are excited about the Seeds of Change Initiative for the Appalachian High Country that is being funded by Heifer International. Johnson County Tennessee has been included with four counties in North Carolina as part of this project.

FUNDING TO DATE:

The JCFM received notice that they were awarded a mini-grant for a total of \$1333.33 from the Appalachian Farmers Market Association. These funds will be used for additional promotional efforts. We also received \$3500 additional funding from Wholesome Wave Foundation through the Appalachian Farmers Market Association for double EBT dollars and EBT technical support for our market. Through our local agricultural extension office, the JCFM received \$2500 for promotional efforts in January 2011. These funds were awarded to the extension office from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program. The JCFM received another \$1000 to continue doubling dollars for our food stamp customers from Appalachian Sustainable Development (through Wholesome Wave Foundation) in 2011.

A total of \$8333.33 in additional grant funding was raised over the course of this grant cycle.