The **City of Texarkana, TX** received **$35,432** to implement an EBT project for the Downtown Farmers' Market that improved access to locally grown produce for low-income consumers across 10 counties within a 4-state area and boosted the economic viability of area farmers by increasing their sales.

Final Report FY 10

2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

Date: ***February 15, 2013***

Recipient Name: ***City of Texarkana, Texas***

Title of Project: ***Farmers' Market Promotions Program, Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market***

Grant Number: ***12-25-G-1197***

Location: ***Texarkana, Texas***

Project Summary

The City of Texarkana, Texas created a Farmers' Market in historic Downtown Texarkana at a former Brownfields site. This reclaimed land presented the City with an opportunity to promote consumption of locally-grown food to residents regardless of income, and improve economic viability for numerous small growers. The City faced an uphill climb to bring growers together, bring people to this downtown food dessert, and expand residents' knowledge of the importance and availability of fresh, locally-grown produce. Texarkana, Texas applied for the Farmers' Market Promotions Program (FMPP) grant through the USDA in order to implement an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program with the goal of improving access to healthy foods for residents and increasing sales for vendors at the Farmers' Market. USDA FMPP funding allowed the city to dramatically increase the number of vendors selling at the market from an average of five per Saturday to ten per Saturday with a top vendor day of nearly twenty; increase the number of patrons of the market with a high of nearly a thousand patrons for the Third Annual Best Salsa in the Ark-La-Tex; and implement an EBT system that was key to increasing sales at the market with vendors reporting significant increases in sales. The City spent $35,432 in grant funds to purchase and implement an EBT system, hire a part time market manager, purchase essential supplies, advertise the market and conduct a series of special events that brought people to the market during the April through September market seasons of 2011 and 2012.

City of Texarkana, Texas 2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

Project Approach

With the funding provided through the Farmers' Market Promotion Program, the City of Texarkana, Texas improved operations at the City's downtown farmers' market. The City provided EBT capabilities, advertised to promote the consumption of fresh produce from local farms, increased sales at the market, expanded local farmer's economic viability, and fostered job creation. The City of Texarkana, Texas pursued several clear goals throughout the project:

- Increase the economic viability of local farmers; and
- Promote consumption of locally-grown produce to all regional residents, regardless of financial status.

In order to reach these goals, the City pursued a strategy to implement and maintain an EBT system, recruit new vendors, train vendors to use the EBT system and improve booth marketing strategies, publicize the availability of the EBT system at the market, and record EBT sales. The activities that the City accomplished to meet program objectives included hiring a market manager, developing a cohesive marketing strategy to reach new vendors and consumers, and implementing the program over a two season time period. Additional activities that advanced the goals of the project included:

- Received for SNAP retailer status through the USDA.
- Conducted 6 Vendor Training Sessions that taught vendors how to use the EBT and token system to increase sales. Training also included information on selecting marketable varieties, buying trends, heirloom varieties, crop rotation, proper pricing to maximize revenue, product placement, branding and marketing strategies.
- Participated in the GoTexan program.
- Received Texas Certified Farmers' Market Status through the GoTexan program.
- Conducted *Chef at the Market* events to teach people how to cook with fresh produce.
- Worked with local extension agents to disseminate fresh food preservation strategies (canning, freezing, drying).
- Worked with City Health Inspector to ensure compliance with all health regulations.
- Conducted advertising campaign using traditional media (newspaper, handouts, flyers, radio, Public access TV) and newer social media (email list, LocalHarvest.org, Craig's List, and Facebook).
- Established working relationships with 35+ farmers/vendors from three states (AR, TX, LA).
- Attended two professional conferences to gain attention among local growers.
- Addressed infrastructure needs: crosswalks, handicap access, and maintenance at the market.
- Purchased Advertising materials (banners, signs, posters, flyers, and other display items).
- Initiated relationships with the Hispanic community to more effectively reach this demographic via Spanish language radio.
- Purchased supplies including portable canopies, fans, and office supplies.
- Worked with local extension agents to disseminate fresh food preservation strategies.
- Conducted 2nd and 3rd Annual Salsa Contests, judged by market participants, drawing more than 700 patrons to the market each time.
- Conducted regular SWOT analysis to improve vendor participation and improve EBT sales.
- Provided fresh, locally grown produce to low and moderate income people from 4 states (AR, TX, LA, OK) not including tourists and travelers.
- Operated the market 3 days per week until drought and heat advisories reduced the supply of product in the market, and discouraged patrons from venturing outdoors.

City of Texarkana, Texas 2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

Goals and Outcomes Achieved

The City of Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market realized significant achievements in the implementation of this project. The two most significant gains were achieved in increasing the economic viability of local farmers and the promotion of locally-grown produce to all regional residents, regardless of financial status.

- The City purchased one Verifone VX610 from FIS Solutions, implemented a token system for EBT and debit transactions, and maintained a "Market Kiosk" booth to facilitate patron education, transaction processing, and vendor payouts. Choosing a wireless system allowed the City to save on installation and maintenance fees in this outdoor space.

- The City of Texarkana, Texas engaged in advertising and promotions to vendors and to current and potential market patrons, especially patrons in low/moderate income areas through a wide variety of advertising mediums. Advertising to potential patrons emphasized local, fresh, and natural produce as well as the availability of EBT and debit card processing.

- The City distributed flyers, posters, brochures and emails to local and regional growers, vendors, farm supply outlets, farm support programs, the local health department, the Housing Authority, health food distributors and at City Hall. This effort included delivery of 3,000 pieces of promotional materials, inclusion in the newsletter distribution to approximately 3,000 recipients on the Bowie County Farm Extension subscription list, two emails per week to the City's email distribution list of 700 individuals, updates at the Miller-Bowie Bi-State Justice Center, and Facebook updates. Advertising to vendors emphasized "free to try" booth rentals and the potential for increased sales with the card processing ability. That potential was realized in significant increases in sales that vendors attributed to improved market conditions, advertising, and the EBT system.

- The Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market ***now has a vendors list of approximately thirty-five vendors who sell at the market, an increase of twenty vendors.*** Vendor attendance ranged from no vendors on some market days to twenty vendors on the highest vendor participation days, with a corresponding increase in the highest number for vendors from ***seven vendors in year one to twenty in year three.***

- The Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market opened three days per week from April through September: Tuesday and Saturday mornings as well as Thursday afternoons in 2011 and Thursday mornings in 2012.

- Patrons had a wide variety of healthy, nutritious foods from which to choose. Patrons routinely praised the quality of the produce and explained that they bought from the market because they wanted produce that was naturally grown, produced locally, and not put through storage or trucked across country. While most sales were untracked cash sales, customers bought just over two thousand dollars in produce using the EBT equipment. Most produce sold between one and two dollars per pound at an average of $1.50 per pound, meaning that 1,333 pounds of fresh produce was sold and consumed by the local population that could be directly attributed to this project.

Beneficiaries

- Low income persons from the surrounding area were able to obtain more wholesome, fresher foods than those available from chain stores. For residents without transportation in this food dessert area, walking to the farmers' market became a weekly ritual. Very few patrons used their EBT cards to purchase fresh foods and vegetables; most would, instead, purchase small quantities with cash. Sales to low income residents clearly increased.

- Consumers in this low-mod area, regardless of income, were able to obtain truly fresh, nutrient rich foods that had not undergone nutrition loss due to storage and transportation time. They purchased foods at prices comparable to chain store prices, but received a more nutritious, better quality product.

- Many multi-generational families shopped at the market. While the benefit to families and children is difficult to quantify, patrons subjectively reported several beneficial effects. Vendors reported taking part in discussions between these families about the importance of sharing their culture through the purchase and preparation of foods associated with their culture that cannot be obtained as fresh produce in box stores, foods like fresh purple hull peas and Nashville peaches. The strengthening of family bonds benefits the entire community.

- Local farmers from three states participated in selling at the market. These small producers gained a new source of revenue. These farmers were able to sell at higher prices than if they had sold their produce wholesale. Texarkana's vendors list included thirty-five vendors, some of whom participated up to three times per week.

- Local farmers were able to diversify their skills and gain marketing and business expertise through targeted training and networking opportunities.

- Vendors reported steadily increasing sales and profits as well as record sales days. Many stated that they had never made "that much money" at the market before having the EBT system, special events, and access to social media. They reported that participation of local chefs improved their bottom lines as well.

- Vendors indicated that they increased their market generated revenue this year despite considerable challenges posed by the weather, the economic downturn, and higher costs. In part, they credit the EBT/Debit processing equipment, dedicated market staff, and increased advertising for the improvement.

- This Farmers' Market achieved something that no other business or activity had achieved in Texarkana for many years – it created a purposeful routine for many people to come downtown on Saturday mornings.

- According to the USDA, every spent dollar diverted from products imported into the area from afar to products produced locally means a $2 dollar economic benefit to the local region. The overall potential impact of this project to local and regional farmers is enormous and includes increased economic viability for local farmers and new job creation.

City of Texarkana, Texas 2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

Lessons Learned

City staff asked vendors to take a chance on helping to build a market that would suit their needs. Staff made the decision to allow vendors to "try it out" by not charging booth rental fees for most of the market season. This proved a successful strategy. The decision reduced possible income for booth rentals, but also facilitated vendor recruitment.

Another challenge that should be mentioned relates to the rural and economically challenged nature of this region. Not all potential vendors and/or patrons can be reached easily through traditional media, and even fewer can be reached via new media. Conversely, those who are adept at new media expect communication in electronic form through Facebook, email, or other electronic media. Radio and television advertising effectively reach some populations that the other media do not. Face to face recruitment of qualified prospects is still essential to this new market. Finding the appropriate mix for communications and advertising is essential to getting messages out to possible vendors and patrons.

Outreach to the Hispanic community included targeted ads on Spanish language radio and personal contacts with Hispanic community members. Further outreach to the Hispanic community and economically disadvantaged communities will be necessary to provide SNAP benefit recipients informational materials on how the EBT system operates at the market and increase participation in the program.

Radio advertising, PSA's and a feature story on a local radio station proved to be successful mechanisms for distributing materials on the market to a broad range of patrons. The City also used select internet sites and exploration of social media mechanisms. Banners, signs, posters and other promotional materials were purchased with grant funds. Additional promotional items were purchased as patron loyalty and name recognition items and distributed to customers at the market. Patrons returned week after week with their bags and wearing their market t-shirts. Every event was well attended with the exception of the initial Grand Opening that was rained out and had to be rescheduled.

At each booth, vendors displayed the yellow posters provided by the USDA that state that EBT/Food Stamps are welcomed. These weathered significantly necessitating lamination and the purchase of a small laminator.

As the season progressed, more people were comfortable with the token system, but many potential EBT customers still chose to purchase with cash. Vendors' subjectively reported satisfaction with increased sales because of the availability of the EBT/Debit machine. Clearly, more outreach, education, and word-of-mouth referrals will be necessary to improve successes. ***Patrons who used the EBT/debit card processing often stated how pleased they were to use the system as they would not have made the purchases if sales were on a cash only basis.***

Outreach to producers and vendors demonstrated mixed results. A few vendors indicated they are travelling greater distances to sell at farmers' markets located in large metropolitan areas, particularly Dallas, Texas and Shreveport, Louisiana. Considering the increases in transportation costs, outreach to these producers and vendors will continue. Outreach efforts have included mass mailing to over 1,300 farmers through the Bowie County Extension Service, distribution of materials through farm supply outlets, email, FaceBook, local media, and personal contact.

Producers from three states (AR, TX, LA) benefited from this FMPP program. The support the City of

Texarkana, Texas through FMPP provided to these producers would not have been possible without the FMPP support. Having a market manager, advertising and promotions, as well as the EBT system significantly improved outcomes for participating producers in the region, especially considering the less than optimal growing season this year.

The weather proved to be a significant challenge to the success of the market. A cold spring followed by the extended drought and the hottest summer on record for this area contributed to dramatic decreases in farm production, lower than anticipated vendor participation, and sometimes sluggish patronage. Late freezes, excessive heat, and record breaking drought conditions significantly impacted both vendor participation and market offerings. For example, tomatoes did poorly in the wet and unseasonably cold spring. It is not possible to estimate the improvement of year one to year two as no records for year one were kept. However, vendors and patrons both say that the market made significant strides this year with a broader range of available produce, greater quantity for purchase, and higher sales.

By far, the greatest challenge at the current location is protection from the weather. Several market days were cancelled, ended early, or postponed due to winds, rain, and/or excessive heat. The portable market canopies are a stop-gap measure; patrons and vendors alike ask about a more permanent and satisfactory solution. The lack of a permanent overhead cover heats the pavement area of the market to uncomfortable temperatures as early as eight in the morning, and there is little to no protection from wind or rain. One solution under consideration is to install a temporary or permanent structure. ***Obtaining funding to build a shed-style structure would also reduce the set-up/take-down burden.***

Excess demand for fresh, natural, and local produce still exists within the community; informative advertising was most successful indicating that consumer education improves demand for local produce. Providing information to consumers about the availability fresh produce, the location and hours of the market, and how to use an EBT or debit card at the market will be paramount in the following years. The location of the market poses some challenges as there is no public transit stop at the market and downtown tends to be more of a drive through area on weekends.

Despite the successes in establishing this market, the City is experiencing significant budget challenges. Every department within the jurisdiction made painful budget cuts to prevent layoffs in the 2013 budget year. Unfortunately, the City has no remaining budget to support the market. A volunteer will act as the market manager and the City will continue to provide electricity, water, and landscaping at the site as it operates without support for advertising. Whether the market is strong enough to be self-sustaining will only be known as this coming market season progresses.

City of Texarkana, Texas 2010 FMPP Final Performance Report

Additional Information:

Produce sold at the market included locally grown peaches, blueberries, strawberries, watermelons, cantaloupes, pears, figs, squashes, greens, kale, cabbage, lettuces, okra, corn, tomatoes, peppers, beans, peas, farm eggs, honey, baked goods, home-canned goods, herbs, bath supplies, sunflower seeds, as well as fresh-cut flowers.

Technical assistance has been readily available from the Texas Department of Agriculture, the GoTexan program, City staff, and the FMPP team. Training and educational materials were made available through FMPP at the Grant Training Workshop in Washington, D.C., through a collaborative project jointly sponsored by the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff and Texas A&M Prairie View, and the Living from the Ground Up Small Farms Expo hosted by the Northeast Texas Community College. City staff represented the Market at each of these events.

Vendors were provided with free marketing and educational materials from the GoTexan program, the City of Texarkana Office of Sustainability. and Growing for Market News and Ideas for Local Food Producers Growing For Market, *Selling at Farmers Markets: Ideas and information to make your venture a success* (http://www.growingformarket.com/)

Brochures, advertisements and other graphics begin on the next page

Contact person:

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TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS

Farmers' Market

Farm. Fresh. Fun!

2011 Market Season
April 28 — Sept 29

At the Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market, we're making it easier than ever for our local producers, vendors, crafters, and farmers to ***make more money***. Your customers will be able to spend more because we've got state-of-the-art equipment to process debit and SNAP/Food Stamp cards!

No Cash? No Problem! Your customers will swipe their cards at the City of Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market kiosk & receive tokens in exchange.

They'll spend tokens with you and you will get your cash payments at the end of the market day. Of course, cash customers will still be welcome.

Now welcoming fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, plus crafts, baked goods, eggs, meats, canned items, and so much more.

Attend Vendor Training for more information!

NEW HOURS

Sat and Tues

7-Noon

Thurs

4-6:30

Texarkana's only afternoon/ evening market!

Located at 3rd and Texas

FARMERS &VENDORS

GET YOUR BOOTH!

Required Vendor Training at City Hall

April 7: 10 to noon or 5:30 to 7 *or*
April 21: 10 to noon or 5:30 to 7

CALL TODAY

Farmers' Market Manager

(903) 798-3903

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Farmers Market
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Earth Day, Boy Scouts help with the market landscaping.

GET YOUR BOOTH!

Required Vendor Training

Dates:
April 7th or April 21st
Times:
10am to Noon or 5:30pm to 7pm

Everything you need to know about:

- Market's new debit/SNAP cards/Food Stamps payment processing equipment
- Health and safety information
- What requires a license?
- How to increase your sales

Training at Texarkana, Texas City Hall, 2nd Floor Conference Room

Farm . Fresh . Fun

Booth Prices

First Month (electricity not included)	FREE
1 Booth (per day)	$5.00
1 Booth (per day *with* electricity)	$10.00
1 Booth Weekly Rate (3 days per week for the price of 2—*w/o* electricity)	$10.00
1 Booth Weekly Rate (3 days per week for the price of 2—*with* electricity)	$20.00

ASK ABOUT DISCOUNTS FOR ADVANCE PAYMENTS

Now welcoming fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs, plus crafts, baked goods, eggs, meats, canned items, and so much more.

Attend Vendor Training for more info!

I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

Name	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
Phone	
Email	

I'm interested in:

- [ ] Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
- [ ] Canned, Baked or Dried Market Goods
- [ ] Cut Flowers
- [ ] Nursery Stock
- [ ] Seeds
- [ ] Eggs
- [ ] Meats
- [ ] Quality Hand-Crafted Items
- [ ] A Booth at the Market!

Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market

305 Texas Blvd, Texarkana, TX 75501
P.O. Box 1967, Texarkana, TX 75504
Phone: (903) -798-3903
Fax: (903) 798-3913
E-mail: farmersmarket@txkusa.org

OPEN TODAY
TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS
Farmers' Market
Farm. Fresh. Fun!

GET READY for the BEST SALSA in THE ARK-LA-TEX CONTEST
Saturday July 16
Free Entry: 7-9AM
Sample and Vote : 9-10:30AM
Prizes: 11AM
Great Prizes for 1st and 2nd Place
Call or email for details
TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS
Farmers' Market
Farm. Fresh. Fun!
This week at the market:
fresh red and green tomatoes,
yellow-meat watermelons,
local honey, home-canned salsa,
peppers, baked goodies, natural
doggie treats, and Nashville peaches!
Thurs 4-6:30pm Sat&Tues 7am-12*farmersmarket@txkusa.org
(903) 798-3903*Downtown@3rd & Texas Blvd

Grand
Opening
Saturday
May 21
TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS
Farmers' Market
Farm. Fresh. Fun!
Now Open
Thurs 4-6:30pm
Sat & Tues
7am-Sold Out
WE WELCOME DEBIT
& AR/TX SNAP Cards!
farmersmarket@txkusa.org (903) 798-3903
Downtown @ 3rd and Texas Blvd

Farmers' Market

BUY FRESH · BUY LOCAL

First of the Nashville PEACHES Saturday!

Events Calendar

June 23 — Cooking for Life: Diabetes Management Day: 8AM Chef Cooks Low-Carb! 10AM

July 14 — 3rd ANNUAL BEST SALSA IN THE ARK-LA-TEX CONTEST: Salsa from local farmers. From Mild to Heat-in' up the Kitchen! Vote and take some home! Chef Cooks Muy Picante! 9AM

July 21 — Children's Day: Lemonade Stand Contest TBA

July 28 — Watermelon Contest: Best tasting watermelons on earth! Try your luck in the seed spitting contest! 9AM

Downtown—305 Texas Blvd

Saturday, Tuesday, Thursday

7AM to Sold-Out

Located at 305 Texas Blvd in historic downtown Texarkana, the Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market is a seasonal open-air farmers' market featuring quality locally grown, natural produce. Vine-ripened heirloom tomatoes, hot peppers, crook-neck yellow squash, herbs, crafts, home-baked goods, farm eggs, home-canned items, and local honey are among the farm-fresh, nutrition-packed items at the Texarkana, Texas Farmers' Market. **Find us on Facebook and LocalHarvest.org**

(903) 798-3903 · farmersmarket@txkusa.org

TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS

Farmers' Market

Farm. Fresh. Fun!

SNAP CARDS & DEBIT CARDS WELCOME

TEXARKANA ★ TEXAS

Farmers Market

Farm. Fresh. Fun!

BUY FRESH BUY LOCAL

Saturday

July 16

2nd ANNUAL
BEST SALSA
IN THE
ARK-LA-TEX
CONTEST

Enjoy Tasting Salsa,
Win Prizes, Get a Free Salsa
Lesson, and
Groove to Mariachi

OPEN
Tues & Sat: 7AM til
Sold Out
Thurs: 4-6:30PM

(903) 798-3903

305 Texas Blvd

It's Gettin' Hot Around Here…

To Enter:

1. Bring Your Fresh or Home-Canned Salsa to the Farmers' Market from 7AM til 9AM
2. Fill Out an Entry Form
3. Sample Salsas and Vote for Your Favorites from 9AM til 10:30AM
4. Prizes Awarded at 11AM

farmersmarket@txkusa.org

Now accepting DEBIT & EBT Cards!