

Growing Farmers and Farmers Markets in Rural Appalachia through Training, Mentoring, and Regional Collaboration

Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) of Abingdon, VA received \$68,906 to increase participation in 12 regional farmers markets by training and mentoring new farmers, purchasing EBT equipment to attract poverty-level and underserved consumers, and implementing promotional events for these markets. Funds were used to identify and train new vendors for farmers markets; purchase EBT equipment; and pay for advertising campaigns and promotional events.

Final Report

Final Progress Report for USDA Farmers Market Promotion Grant # 12-25-G-0756

We are delighted to report that Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD) met or exceeded most of the goals and objectives set forth in this grant. Great strides were made in the development of a more vibrant and active Farmers Market community in southwest Virginia and east Tennessee. The Appalachian Farmers Market Association (AFMA) is now an active group with representatives from 11 Farmers Markets meeting monthly to help continue the work set forth in this grant. An additional 8 Farmers Markets benefit indirectly from the work of AFMA, and we have hopes that several of these will choose to become active members in the near future.

Specific accomplishments in each goal area are detailed below.

Goal 1: Increase the number of farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs selling through farmers markets and increase their sales and economic viability.

- AFMA started with its first meeting in October of 2008. There were 5 people present at that first meeting representing 2 Farmers Markets. Since then we have not missed a monthly meeting and the average attendance has been 11 people with regular attendance from 11 different Farmers Markets. These folks have driven most of the accomplishments that follow.
- In the winter of 2009 we held 4 regional meetings to make farmers aware of the marketing opportunities that were available to them in their communities – Bristol, TN (6 participants); Marion, VA (24); Jonesborough, TN (22) and Duffield, VA (20). Many of these participants became active in their local Farmers Markets.
- In January of 2009, AFMA held its first winter conference in conjunction with the Appalachian Region Horticulture Conference in Abingdon. Over 100 participants enjoyed the conference (at least 45 there specifically for the AFMA workshops) and attended a variety of classes geared towards production for Farmers Markets and special classes for Market managers (see attachment).
- In December of 2009 AFMA held its first annual Seed Swap attracting 35 folks to Bristol, TN to share seed varieties and to attend short courses on organic farming, raising small animals for Market sales and using EBT/SNAP at a Farmers Market (see attachment).
- In February of 2010, AFMA held its second conference in Lebanon, VA. Despite a winter weather emergency, over 275 (!) people came to hear from two gifted keynote speakers and participated in a variety of workshops. See attachment.
- Project Manager (and ASD Education Coordinator) Tom Peterson made a “Farm Planning for Farmers Markets” presentation at the Big Stone Gap Farmers Market winter meeting in Jan 2010 for 38 potential vendors.
- Tom Peterson conducted a hoop house building workshop for 34 people in Greeneville, TN in May 2009
- ASD organized three “Local Foods Celebration Suppers” which highlight foods from local Farmers Markets by having local chefs create a fresh, local buffet supper – July

12, 2009 in Kingsport, TN for 120 folks; July 22 in Abingdon, VA for 80 and again on August 5 in Abingdon for 92.

- ASD and AFMA worked together to compile information for a Local Food Guide which will highlight over 100 farms and restaurants in the region that feature local foods, plus a comprehensive listing of all area Farmers markets – to be printed in Mid-May 2010 and distributed (5000 copies) throughout the summer months of 2010.
- ASD has worked to encourage local meat producers to work together to expand their marketing reach into local colleges and through internet sales (to add to their Farmers Market sales -- first meeting in April 2008. 15 producers currently active. First online sales in May 2010.
- Tom Peterson logged over 70 visits to farmers throughout the region to help with organic production issues, marketing questions and general farm support.

Goal 2: Assist two to three underserved communities to start or expand farmers markets, utilizing training and mentoring by more experienced market leaders.

- Since October 2008, 10 new Farmers Markets have become active in our region – most with direct support and consultation from ASD – Big Stone Gap, Lebanon, Marion, Glade Spring, St. Paul, Norton and Chilhowie in Virginia; Elizabethton, Jonesborough and Johnson County in TN. All of these Markets are still active and growing.
- The AFMA monthly meetings are important times for managers of established Markets to share information and experiences with managers of these younger Markets. A good portion of each meeting is set aside for timely sharing and dialog to help all Markets improve what they are doing and to find ways to offer mutual support and training. Effective promotional ideas have been successfully shared and developed here.
- ASD was able to provide direct assistance to several emerging Farmers markets through the mini-grant program in this grant. These monies are used to help new Markets with promotional and operational expenses as they get off the ground. Each request was reviewed by active AFMA members to ensure that the money was used in an effective and cost-effective way. In the spring of 2009, the following Markets received \$2000.00 mini grants: Glade Spring, Big Stone Gap, Jonesborough and Lebanon. In the spring of 2010, Johnson County, TN and St. Paul Farmers Markets each received a share of the remaining \$2000.00.
- Two Conferences and Seed Swap workshops were designed specifically to help market managers of new and emerging Farmers Markets effectively develop their Markets.
- A local design firm, Coburn Creative, was selected from a number of bids to develop a website for AFMA that will serve to promote Farmers Markets throughout the region by providing Market contact information and hours, a calendar of events and information to educate customers and vendors about successful aspects of Farmers Markets.

Goal 3: Increase access to healthy, local foods in our communities, especially among seniors and low to moderate income households.

- ASD is active in helping vendors learn about and sign up to accept coupons from the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (currently offered only in Virginia). AFMA has grown into an effective tool for helping to disseminate information throughout the region.
- AFMA is an effective catalyst for Markets to share information about other social programs that benefit Farmers Market vendors such as WIC (TN Markets only) and EBT/SNAP.
- In July, 2009, the Abingdon Farmers Market came online to accept SNAP benefits through the EBT system. An additional grant from the Wholesome Wave Foundation enabled the AFM to double the value of each SNAP transaction leading to close to \$2000.00 in SNAP transactions at Market (a nearly \$4000.00 benefit to Market vendors!). With a full season of EBT use in 2010 and more effective advertising and collaborations, AFM hopes to triple those numbers.
- Four additional Markets are planning to launch EBT/SNAP in 2010 with guidance and support from ASD, AFMA and Sara Cardinale, the AFM market manager.
- The Abingdon Farmers Market, Healthy Families; Family Farms, and the Ecumenical Faith in Action Food Pantry (EFiA) joined forces in September 2009 to host a “Cooking with Fresh Ingredients” workshop during an EFiA pick-up. Over 50 folks came out to learn some simple recipes from a local chef and to get information about EBT/SNAP at the AFM as well as other healthy eating options.
- Each month the AFM and the Bristol Farmers Market host a “Chef at the Market” program where local chefs prepare simple and nutritious recipes from items that are fresh and in-season at the Farmers Market. There are samples and printed recipes – hundreds of customers benefit from the programs.

This Farmers Market Promotion Program grant has been instrumental in helping to develop and strengthen the farmers Market community in southwest Virginia and east Tennessee. The seeds of this development will continue to grow through the work of ASD and AFMA for many years to come.