

Community Food System Project, Phase 1: Assessment and Planning

Jefferson Area Board for Aging, Inc of Charlottesville, VA received \$48,823 to develop a food system that provides nutritious, local food for area seniors. The system included contracts with local farmers, menu development, food prep equipment, and a transportation system to deliver the cooked meals. Funds were used to coordinate the receipt and distribution of food for area seniors, and purchase food processors and steamers for the commercial kitchen.

Final Report



May 17, 2010

JABA (Jefferson Area Board for Aging)

674 Hillside Drive, Ste. 674

Charlottesville, Virginia

Community Food System Project, Phase 1: Assessment and Planning

FMPP 2008 Awardee #12-25-G-0758

Final Project Report

The primary goal of the first phase in JABA's Community Food System Project was to connect local farmers to consumers by developing a replicable system for providing nutritional meals to low-income seniors using produce from farmers within a 60-mile radius of Charlottesville, Virginia.

Several issues lead us to this goal, including our local farmers' expressed need for additional outlets, the nutritional needs of JABA's senior clients, our community's need for sustainability, and the general need for reproducible models to be shared with other communities and markets.

In order to address these issues we had to examine the food system currently in place in the Charlottesville area. We went about contacting farmers, restaurateurs, University of Virginia (UVA) dining services, local extension agents, UVA sustainability professors and graduate students, registered dietitians, health department professionals, public and private school officials and other representatives of institutional feeding programs. We invited them to convene with the purpose of examining the strengths and weaknesses of our local food system and address ways to improve what was in place. The list of attendees of our first meeting has since become the "who's who" list of local food experts in Virginia, and we all still collaborate regularly for community planning and sustainability projects.

JABA also began creating its own local food system by creating a pilot program within our commercial kitchens. We set a goal of incorporating 20% of local food into our menus. Since our meals consist of five elements—meat, vegetables, fruit, grains, dairy—as long as one of those items in each meal is local, we've achieved 20%. Of course the abundance of produce in the summer makes up for the lack of availability in the winter, but as long as we averaged 20% local per year we were pleased.

The 20% goal led us to work directly with many local farmers. What to grow, how much to grow, how to transport food, when to deliver, how to pay farmers and many more critical aspects all became part of a reproducible model for using local food. Through trial and error, JABA learned many successful ways to incorporate local produce into its menus. We used USDA

FMPP funds to purchase appropriate equipment for quicker processing, upgrade cold storage units to accommodate large deliveries of local produce, and improve means of transporting meals to our centers.

We planned our menus according to what was being harvested each month, and we educated our seniors on the increased nutritional benefits of eating fresh, local food. In addition, JABA nurses and registered dietitians observed our seniors' eating behaviors, listened to their lunchtime conversations, and monitored their health signs. While the long term health benefits are difficult to measure in a study this short, interviews with the seniors indicated the following:

- Clients were not getting many fresh fruits and vegetables in their diets at home;
- Clients did not have access to local produce;
- Clients enjoyed the fresh local produce in their center meals and wanted more;
- Lively conversations at lunchtime took clients back to the days they lived on farms and ate what they grew; and
- Clients ate more and threw away less of their meal.

In order for others to learn from our experiences, we created a hands-on DVD explaining each step of the local food process. This DVD is being distributed nationally and is accompanied by a publication demonstrating how any organization can become a catalyst for a sustainable food system in their community. The DVD and publication are entitled *Meal Programs: Feeding a Crowd with Local Foods* and are enclosed with this package.

In achieving our 20% goal, JABA and the local food advisory board learned very quickly that very few systems were in place to support the preparation, storage and distribution of local food to large institutional feeding programs. The tremendous quantities needed by UVA's student dining programs alone far surpassed what was being grown locally, so supply was an issue. Small farmers are unable to afford the insurance required by such large organizations, so liability was an issue. And because of limited dock/delivery space and staff time, large kitchens could not handle many deliveries each day by many different farmers.

Several members of our advisory board pursued alternative options and organized The Local Food Hub, which serves as a mediator between farmer and institution by buying, insuring, and delivering the produce to the client. The Hub also organizes growing based on its buyers' needs, so farmers can grow according to the Hub's order each season instead of guessing what might sell at the farmers market. It has become an efficient means of connecting farmers to buyers. Our next project will be to study the feasibility of creating a prepping and freezing operation to make larger quantities of local food even more available to larger food service organizations.

Other members of the local food advisory board continue to pursue ways to improve our local food system. Communication and coordination among us prevents duplication of efforts.

Among the ongoing projects are the following:

- Creation of the Virginia Food System Council;
- Feasibility study for a local cannery;
- On-line ordering for local produce;
- Local food policy audit;
- Educational farm to train potential new farmers and laborers;

- Urban gardens;
- Weekly gleanings efforts at the farmers market;
- Local currency exchange at several area farmers markets; and
- EBT at the city farmers market.

The beneficiaries of the Community Food System Project include the following:

- JABA's seniors who are now receiving a higher level of nutrition in their meals because of the inclusion of local produce in our menus;
- JABA seniors who enjoy working, harvesting and eating the produce grown in the center gardens;
- JABA's staff who have access to local produce through our employee local market;
- Student interns from Charlottesville Albemarle Technical Educational Center who work in our kitchens and are learning the benefits of local food;
- Local farmers who are seeing increased revenues for their products;
- Students attending local and private schools who are being served local food in their menus;
- College students who have access to local food through their campus cafeterias;
- Laborers finding more jobs in the farming business;
- Other markets throughout the state and country who are benefiting from our publication and DVD;
- All of us who benefit from the long term positive effects of eating local food, for example, lower health costs over time, improved environmental conditions, preservation of rural land

JABA's Local Food Advisory Board—Participants and Ongoing Collaborators

Alicia Cost, RD Charlottesville City Schools
 Andrea Larson, UVA Darden School professor
 Ann Mallek, farmer, Chairman Albemarle Board of Supervisors
 Anne Bedarf, GreenBlue, Winrock
 April Fletcher, farmer
 Barbara Yager, Thomas Jefferson Health Department
 Brent Beringer, Aramark, UVA Dining Hall director
 Brett Wilson, Horse & Buggy Produce
 Brian Walden, farmer
 Cecile Gorham, Market Central
 Charles Martin, Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction
 Christina Pitsenberger, RD Albemarle County Schools
 Christopher Carpenter, Washington & Lee University
 Dave Simpson, C&O Restaurant
 Dave Stebbins, Martha Jefferson Hospital
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 David Slezak, Tandem Friends School
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 Erika Herz, UVA Darden School sustainability manager
 Gary Scott, Nelson County Farmers Market, farmer

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Gus Schumacher, Wholesome Wave Foundation
Hillary Nagel, Children, Youth & Family Services
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Joe Cloud, T&E Meats
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Julie Gronlund, out-going Charlottesville School Board member
Kate Collier, Feast store owner, Local Food Hub
Kate Pemberton, farmer
Kathy Kildea, Market Central
Kay Jenkins, JABA
Kevin Ruddle, Thomas Jefferson Area Food Bank
Lisa Reeder, A Local Notion
Lynda Fanning, UVA Medical Center, Virginia Dietetic Association
Matthew and Suzanne Holt, Best of What's Around Farm
Matthew Benson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Melissa Wiley, Piedmont Environmental Council
Neal Halvorson-Taylor, community member, Retail Relay
Randy and Ann Marie, Randy's Produce
Regine Kennedy, UVA School of Architecture student
Spencer Neal, Farm Bureau
Stefan Jirka, Blue Moon Fund
Stephanie Malloy, Charlottesville City Farmers Market
Stephanie Meyers, New Branch Farm
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Timothy Beatley, UVA School of Architecture professor
Tom Timmerman, Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network board member
Tonya Denkla-Cobb, UVA Institute for Environmental Negotiation
Trisha Costello, Innisfree Garden
Whitney Newton, UVA engineering student
Will Richey, Revolutionary Soup restaurant owner

Other Funders to Date

Blue Moon Fund
Wholesome Wave Foundation
USDA FMPP 2009
JABA
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