

The **Western Virginia Workforce Development Board** of Roanoke, VA received **\$82,856** to purchase a mobile teaching kitchen; buy print advertising; conduct farmer/vendor training sessions on business development, production practices, certifications and logistics; and conduct consumer classes on buying, cooking, canning, and food safety of local food.

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Final Report

Date: December 26, 2012

Title of Project: Strengthening the Covington Farmers' Market Through Farmer Development and the New EBT Project

Grant Number: VA-073-2010-G-1199

Location (City/State): Covington, VA

Contact Name/Telephone Number: Doloris E. Vest, President, 540-767-6149

FINAL REPORT

The "Strengthening the Covington Farmers' Market Through Farmer Development and the New EBT Project" proved to be an exciting and beneficial project for the Covington Farmers' Market. The project focused on organizational structure and operations, but more importantly on future planning and promotion of the market to yield a sustainable farmers' market to support the Alleghany Highlands and the City of Covington. With a successful farmers' market, the City of Covington will have positive economic and workforce results that will serve as an investment in the community for generations to come. The project resulted in positive and widespread promotion of the Covington Farmers' Market, measurable market growth, as well as community education of current and future vendors and consumers, while strengthening community partnerships.

Activities and Milestones:

In the first quarter of the grant, Doloris Vest, President, Western Virginia Workforce Development Board (WVWDB), attended the Farmers Market Promotion Program Orientation/Training meeting of the 2010 FMPP Awardees in Washington, D.C. This conference was a great tool to gain knowledge about the overseeing this grant and the reporting process.

A Market Manager was sought and hired for overseeing market operations. The Market Manager was hired in January 2011. Although, there was turnover in the Market Manager position during the first market season of the grant period, this role proved to be vital in the promotion and success of the Covington Farmers' Market. The Market Manager was responsible for community outreach to civic and religious based organizations, market operations and operation policies, vendor recruitment, workshop organization, promotion and future planning.

The Market Manager was crucial to the success and sustainability planning required for the Covington Farmers Market. The Market Manager was able to cross promote the Covington Farmers' Market with other area farmers' markets, and businesses. The market manager worked with the manager of the Clifton Forge Farmers' Market, located within the same county, to create a Farmers' Market Association with other farmers' markets located in the region. This association will serve as a common interest group that will work to standardize rules and regulations at the area markets, distribute news and other valued information to vendors and consumers, and to further the promotional reach of what is reasonable for the farmers' markets individually. This collaboration will not only further the goals of the project, it will further the overall goals of the USDA FMPP effort.

The Market Manager was successful in furthering the presence of the Covington Farmers' Market through alternative means. The Market Manager was able to have the Covington Farmers' Market listed as a local point of interest on the Virginia's Western Highland Artisan Trail. She also furthered the promotion of the Covington Farmers Market by utilizing social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as establishing a newsletter and a blog surrounding the Covington Farmers' Market and its activities.

The Market Manager was able to obtain free SNAP/EBT equipment for the farmers' market to provide a method for those on food stamps to utilize their benefits to purchase locally grown goods.

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The Market Manager reached out to the local Department of Social Services to further promote the SNAP/EBT efforts at the Covington Farmers’ Market. This not only spread the word about the benefits of SNAP/EBT, but of the Covington Farmers’ Market too. In these efforts she also provided education to this local agency on the benefits of buying locally grown foods.

Advertising was secured in two regional magazines, Natural Awakenings and Edible Blue Ridge. Both magazines ran color advertisements to attract vendors and customers from around central and southwest Virginia to the Covington Farmers Market. Natural Awakenings Magazine also allowed for no-cost advertisement of events and educational workshops that were held at the Covington Farmers Market. Promotional items were also purchased and distributed at the Covington Farmers’ Market. Bumper stickers (removable clings) were purchased to offer community pride for the local farmers market, to draw attention to the farmers market and draw new customers to the market. The bumper stickers were chosen as an efficient means to blanket the area with “free, mobile” advertising. The bumper stickers were handed out to customers making purchases at the farmers market and to others within the community at other community events.

Education was a key component to the success and outreach of the Covington Farmers’ Market. Both vendor and consumer workshops were held at the farmers’ market, to educate on the benefits of supporting a local farmers’ market and its farmers, but also on regulations, farming/growing techniques, etc. In all, 22 workshops were held in compliance with expected outcomes of the FMPP grant funded project. See the table below for a complete list of workshops.

Consumer Workshops	Vendor Workshops
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turf Maintenance • SNAP Benefits • Vermiculture Workshop • Seed Harvesting • Composting Techniques • Pruning Hints & Tips • Planting Seeds & Tips for the Best Place to Plant Pumpkins • Pressure Canning Facts and Testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting Plants in Greenhouses • Square Foot Gardening • Beekeeping Basics • Weights and Measures • Small Business Opportunities, Liability and Recordkeeping • VDACS Regulations for 2011 • Taxes: What you need to know? • Hoophouses: Extending the Growing Season • GAP Certification/Audit Workshop • Weathering the Four Seasons • Turning Clay Soil into a Productive Garden • VDACS Regulations for 2012 • CFM Market Vendor Panel: "What you need to know?" • Virginia Cooperative Extension - Resources Available to Market Growers

As noted above, one of the workshops hosted by the Covington Farmers Market introduced farmers to the requirements and benefits of becoming GAP Certified. Mr. Wythe Morris of the Virginia Cooperative Extension explained the requirements to successfully pass a GAP Audit, and how this could enable farmers to grow their business. This project had expectations of paying 50% of the cost to get GAP Certified for 21 farms, and 100% for two farms, for a total of 23 farms to get GAP Certified. Due to time constraints limiting the availability of the GAP Auditors to perform the GAP Audits, increased audit charges, and the financial burden to some of the farmers to pay their 50%, WVWDB in the end paid for a total of 14 farms (8 of which were paid at 100%) to undergo the audit required for GAP Certification. All 14 farms earned their certification. This will enable these farmers to grow their business to a new customer base, and to be recognized as a farm producing quality products under quality practices.

The Market Manager was supported by the Covington Farmers Market Steering Committee.

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The Steering Committee, consisting of volunteer members from the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Olde Town Covington, a vendor representative, a consumer representative and WVWDB, held meetings on a regular basis, 1 – 4 meetings per month depending on the time of the year, market season and market needs. Through these meetings operational guidelines, vendor rules, and regulations for the farmers’ market were established, strategies for soliciting and securing quality vendors from the local farming community were developed, a promotion plan utilizing local media and community outreach was created, community educational workshops were identified and planned, as well as sustainability and transition requirements following the end of the grant period.

A mobile teaching kitchen, purchased with FMPP grant funds, was utilized for storage of refrigerated and frozen goods, and for educational workshops and demonstrations at the Covington Farmers Market. In an effort to draw more attention to the market, and to provide more education to the public, the Market Manager partnered with a local Career and Technical Education School to allow for the students enrolled in the culinary arts program, to prepare foods in the mobile kitchen during future market seasons. This will aid in producing more public interest by having presentations by the culinary students to bring more customer traffic to the market, as well as provide a location for these students to further their education and skills. This effort aligns with the goal of the project of providing positive workforce results, by allowing the students to have more exposure within their future career choices, as well as provide an alternate venue for what would be considered typical for culinary students and their training.

The mobile teaching kitchen was housed on site at the Covington Farmers’ Market throughout the year, including winter months. By allowing the mobile teaching kitchen to stay on site, with the beautiful decals that were purchased with FMPP funds and applied to the mobile kitchen, this yielded yet another method of grabbing attention for the Covington Farmers’ Market during the winter months. The Covington Farmers’ Market is located in route to one of the area’s largest tourist attractions, The Homestead Resort. The Homestead Resort, located in Hot Springs, VA is a historic and luxury resort that draws visitors from all over the region, as well as the world, to ski and enjoy the famous spa and hot springs during the winter months. With the large and bright decals on the mobile kitchen, the Farmers’ Market was very visible to passing traffic and provided great advertisement for customers who will return to the area in the future.



The mobile teaching kitchen was purchased as a tool for the Covington Farmers Market, but an unrealized benefit was gained for the people living in the City of Covington. Strong partnerships were formed and gained during the process of setting up the mobile teaching kitchen, including a corporate partner of Advance Auto Parts, regional partnerships with businesses, and a local

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partnership with the City of Covington Government. The City of Covington agreed to assume ownership of the mobile teaching kitchen, and add it to its own fleet of vehicles at the end of the grant project, to allow for its continued use at the Covington Farmers Market, without any financial burden to the farmers' market. The City of Covington will provide the necessary insurance coverage, and will cover any other future expenses associated with the mobile teaching kitchen.

The Covington Farmers' Market continues to be supported through other outlets as well. The Alleghany Foundation awarded the Covington Farmers' Market a grant for \$84,000 to aid in construction of a new market structure (completed 2011) that was designed and built by the students of the Virginia Tech Architecture Department. The new structure, houses 30 vendor spaces, restrooms, a seating area, an entertainment area and a public green space. (See pictures below)



The Covington Farmers Market operated two seasons during the grant period. The first season launched with a grand opening celebration on May 14, 2011, and both seasons running from May through October on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The initial start-up of the market included only a few vendors, due to construction of the new farmers' market structure and seasonal farming that would show an increase in participation later in the season. As vendor participation grew, so did customer traffic, total sales and sales per customer. Both market seasons showed growth year over year, and a tremendous growth, in traffic, vendor participation and sales, was seen as a result of the work provided through the FMPP Grant during the entire grant period. See the following table for year over comparisons, before and during the grant period.

Covington Farmers Market Year over Year Comparisons	2010 Market Numbers (Prior to the FMPP Grant)	2011 Market Numbers	Increase over Previous Year	2012 Market Numbers	Increase over Previous Year	Increase from Pre-Grant Period to End of Grant Period
Total # of Vendors	8	28	250%	32	14%	300%
Total # of Customers	2321	3757	62%	3801	1%	64%
Total Sales Dollars	\$3,679	\$7,543	105%	\$14,343	90%	290%
Average Sale per Customer	\$1.59	\$2.01	26%	\$3.77	88%	137%

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In December 2011, the Covington Farmers' Market opened for 3 dates for a Holiday Market. This market was well attended by both vendors and customers. Approximately 30 vendors sold food items, arts and crafts. The Holiday Market served to grow public interest in the market throughout the winter months, as well as to continue vendor sales and business in a central location throughout the winter months. The local Boys' Home sold Christmas Trees, and a local Boy Scouts troop sold Christmas wreaths. Although these vendors were not your typical farmers' market vendors, they did help draw more public attention to the market. In the 3 days the Holiday Market was operating, more than 700 customers visited the Covington Farmers Market, with over \$1500 in sales. (Note: These sales and traffic numbers are not reflected in the table above. This was a promotional and a trial market event that we did not have comparison numbers for.) The market manager worked to organize this event in the efforts of maintaining the public presence of the Covington Farmers' Market even during off season/winter months. The Steering Committee has decided to make this an annual promotional event.

Summary:

Overall, the "Strengthening the Covington Farmers' Market Through Farmer Development and the New EBT Project" was a great success. Both vendor and customer participation at the Covington Farmers' Market showed tremendous growth throughout the grant period. Total sales at the farmers market increased, along with total average sales per customer. Farmers, both vendors and non-vendors, gained education about how to successfully run their farming business for growth, sustainability and prosperity. 14 farmers gained GAP Certifications, enabling more farming growth opportunities for this region. The Covington community has been strengthened by the presence and growth of the farmers market. More patrons located within the city of Covington and the surrounding areas began to shop at the farmers market, and in turn the customer traffic began to trickle into surrounding businesses. This was an added benefit to the project and a positive financial impact to the community as a whole. Ties with other farmers' markets, community agencies, local and regional businesses, and education institutions were also strengthened through partnerships with the farmers' market.

The future of the Covington Farmers' Market has never looked brighter. Having a new structure to house the farmers market, the mobile teaching kitchen to facilitate educational opportunities, as well as aid farmers starting their new business to have access to storage for goods being sold at the market, and strengthening workforce development opportunities, the impact of a strengthened Covington Farmers' Market will be felt for generations to come. Plans are already being made for a silent auction, tractor show, and plated dinner fundraisers to further support the Covington Farmers' Market and its operations. The Steering Committee will continue to oversee operations of the farmers' market, and develop means of financial support to provide for continued growth and sustainability.

Grant Funding Expenditures:

A total of \$81,130.51 of the \$82,856 grant award has been spent on this project. \$1725.49 was not spent from the grant award. \$1,700 of the unspent funding was remaining from honorariums that were not requested by the presenters for payment.

- Personnel expenses = \$24,979.91
 - Project Manager = \$10,235.49
 - Market Manager = \$14,744.42
- Mobile Teaching Kitchen = \$35,394.95
 - Mobile Kitchen Purchase = \$34,619.95
 - Insurance = \$775.
- Market Manager Cell Phone: \$1,040.75
 - Cell Phone = \$9.99
 - Cell Phone Service = \$1,030.76

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- Travel Expense (Trip to Washington, D.C. for FMPP orientation) = \$782.12
- Mileage Expense = \$1,433.22
 - Project Manager = \$1,089.99
 - Market Manager = \$343.23
- Contractor = \$400 Honorarium
- GAP Audits for Farmers = \$7,595
- Supplies = \$758.06
 - Office Supplies = \$299.37
 - Workshop Materials (Handouts & Refreshments) = \$182.89
 - Certified Scales = \$275.80
- Marketing = \$8,746.50
 - Sign = \$2,500
 - Mobile Kitchen Promotion Wrap = \$1200.00
 - Posters/Flyers = \$375.00
 - Bumper Stickers = \$1,946.00
 - Magazine Advertisement = \$2,725.50

Additional Information:

The Covington Farmers' Market website: www.covingtonfarmersmarket.com

The Covington Farmers' Market Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/album.php?id=831910181&aid=530106#!/pages/Covington-Farmers-Market/190891212901> .

Follow Virginia Tech's Construction of the Market Structure at:

<http://twitter.com/designbuildLAB#>

<http://designbuildlab.blogspot.com/>

