

The **Association of Africans Living in Vermont** OF Burlington, VT received **\$33,954** to improve earnings for 35 new African-American farmers and promote the consumption of local agricultural commodities by low-income households by establishing 4 new EBT-accessible markets in public housing complexes and at a downtown public transportation hub.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Performance Report

Date: December 21, 2012

Recipient Name: Association of Africans Living in Vermont

Title of Project: New Markets by New Americans

Grant Number: 151293938

Location (City/State): Chittenden County, Vermont

Project Summary: The New Markets by New Americans Project has the goal of promoting the local consumption of agricultural commodities—specifically among low-income and geographically marginalized households—with Vermont’s low income refugee and immigrant farmers being the entrepreneurs cooperating to expand their direct-marketing to those community segments. The Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), a minority serving 501(c)3 coordinates and manages the program, in collaboration with refugee and immigrant farmers who are a part of AALV’s New Farms for New Americans Project (NFNA). The project includes three major activity areas: (1) small business marketing, and customer relations farmer training in an adaptive ESL format; (2) the constitution of 4 new EBT-accessible markets in public housing complexes and a downtown public transportation hub; and (3) a new American farmer-run CSA, also EBT-accessible, which targets underserved low-income, senior and minority consumers. The project has worked to improve gross earnings for 35 New American farmers, while providing fresh food to those who currently cannot access it. The project includes a curriculum development and outreach phase, followed by planning and education, followed by marketing and sales.

Project Approach:

The New Markets for New Americans project included:

1. A curriculum development and outreach phase followed by;
2. Planning and education, followed by;
3. Marketing and sales.

One program assistant and one part-time technical assistant collaborated on two tracks of classroom curriculum and outreach. The first track targeted the NFNA social enterprise farmers farming on the incubator farm and the second targeted the NFNA independent farmers who maintain their own land and markets. The NFNA staff held a kick-off celebration/meeting to recruit farmers in December 2010 and December 2011. These classes were administered during the winter months of 2011 and 2012. In 2011 a total of eleven classes were held in January and February and in 2012 the classes were streamlined down to seven classes during the same two months. Farmers were required to attend these workshops as well as ESL classes focusing on farm-related English.

The planning and education workshops covered the following information:

- ESL Glossary of Terms and Garden Vocabulary
- USDA programs
- Prepared Food Ideas
- Soil Management Basics
- Program Communication
- Brassica Care
- Eggplants, Onions, Green Beans
- Lettuce, Salad Mix, Scallions, Cilantro
- Growing using the Vermont Calendar
- Starting Seeds Indoors
- Farmers Market Displays

While classes were formally held during the winter, there was also 18 hours a week of technical assistance offered on the farm throughout the summer. These field walk classes covered planting, harvesting, plant and insect disease, as well as post-production handling and packaging. Classes were also held at farmers' market stands to provide on-site assistance on produce display and customer interaction.

To assist with marketing, NFNA staff held on-site trainings at farm stands and farmers' markets. These trainings discussed how to price produce, how to set up a market display, how to best use signage and customer relations. Additionally, NFNA staff worked with the independent farmers to create autobiographies to be used as a marketing tool. Staff also assisted farmers with creating business names.

In the spring and summer, NFNA staff tackled the other side of the issue—low-income, geographically marginalized communities—limited access to fresh, local organic foods by holding several community outreach meetings to discuss how to use EBT cards and other coupons administered by the state of Vermont. The goal of these meetings was to break down barriers amongst refugees and immigrants that might prevent them from shopping at farm stands and farmers' markets. These community meetings also provided the NMNA staff and farmers to hand out \$2.00 coupons for the farm stands and for the farmers to encourage members of their own community to come to the markets.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

The project coordinator, one part-time assistant/interpreter and two part-time technical assistant staff worked with independent refugee farmers during the scope of this grant in a variety of ways to achieve multiple outcomes.

One of the main goals for the New Markets by New Americans project was to create better marketing materials for the New Farms for New Americans farm stands¹, farmers' markets² and the businesses belonging to the NFNA independent refugee farmers.

1. FMPP grant helped to purchase two sandwich boards advertising the new farm stands and strategically placed in high traffic areas the program aimed to draw in more customers in what are commonly viewed as food deserts.
2. With assistance from NFNA staff, the independent refugee farmers created marketing for their independent businesses. The main marketing strategy in this case was to highlight the biographies of these farmers. By sharing personal narratives along with photographs, the refugee farmers used the power of story to promote their products.
3. Additionally, NMNA assisted in a cost share program for the independent refugee farmers to create better signage and product displays for their businesses. NFNA also assisted refugee independent farmers with business names and logos.
4. NFNA staff taught the independent refugee farmers how to write an invoice, establish a bank account and learn basic accounting for their businesses. NFNA conducted these classes in English with an interpreter available for translation assistance when needed.
5. NFNA staff provided the independent refugee farmers several days of on-site farmers' market training, which covered topics on product displays and customer relations. By conducting the trainings onsite at the farmers' markets and farm stands, the independent refugee farmers immediately made their lessons applicable.

Another goal was to place EBT machines and local organic food in non-traditional locations currently designated as food deserts. The NMNA project helped to purchase two new EBT machines (AALV already owned one) to be used at the new farm stands with the goal to reach low-income populations in local food deserts, where locally grown, organic food is not easily accessible. NFNA producers marketed seconds, or extra produce at the farm stands. Because of the EBT machines in non-traditional locations, the NMNA program used this opportunity to prioritize the sale of culturally significant produce to the low-income refugee communities living in the food desert areas. The NMNA also became a new venue for NFNA producers and the independent refugee farmers.

The following data was collected in 2011.

- 14 different NFNA producers participated as vendors at 7 weeks of New Markets for New Americans public housing farm stands, while 30 producers contributed produce.
- 23% of the NMNA farm stand sales in 2011 were EBT sales.

¹ Farm Stand: single vendor. In this case, NFNA was the only vendor, though sometimes joined by an independent refugee farmer participating in NFNA's social enterprise program.

² Farmer's Market: multiple vendors. In this case, NFNA joined roughly six other vendors, depending on the day.

- NMNA had a total of 14 market days between the 87 Elm St and Franklin Square farm stands during 2011. (This was less than originally expected due to three floods in spring of 2011 and Hurricane Irene in August 2011. The USDA determined that all produce flooded by the Winooski River was contaminated and could not be sold.)
- Sales totals in 2011 were \$400 in sales total, or \$28 in sales per market day.

NOTE: Produce brought to these markets was either seconds or reflected an abundance of that crop and therefore allowed NMNA to keep the prices low. NMNA also hosted a number of promotions: another incentive to draw low-income consumers living in a food desert to the farm stands. Though the profit margin was not as high as it could have been, the low sales numbers were compensated by other desired outcomes of the programs, namely market training.

The following data was collected in 2012:

- 10 NFNA producers participated as vendors at 13 weeks of NMNA farm stands, while 52 producers contributed produce.
- Combined sales from the two farm stands and one farmers' market were an estimated \$2597.25 dollars.
- 16% of all sales were EBT sales. (\$418.25 in EBT sales from two farm stands and one farmers' market)
- NMNA had a total of 30 market days between the King Street and O'Brien farm stands and Old North End Farmers' Market.

A third goal was to provide low-income people with access to a farmer-run Community Supported Agriculture share. Due to feedback from the refugee community, a farmer-run CSA, which targeted underserved, low-income refugees was not formally developed. The assistant manager of the NFNA program did establish a small Bhutanese CSA at considerably lower cost than the typical share, which is a flat fee of \$25.00/week. The Bhutanese made-to-order farm share allowed consumers to pick and choose only the produce they wanted. The idea of 'experimenting' with unknown produce automatically included in a share was not financially smart. The ability to use an EBT machine to pay for the produce did not seem to matter since the Bhutanese refugees also received other food supplements, like the Harvest Health Coupons as well as regularly gleaned produce from the farm itself.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES:

The New Markets for New Americans exceeded its expectations in terms of the gross earnings of 35 farmers and providing fresh food to those who currently cannot access it. These earnings are generated income from farmers markets, farm stands, wholesale accounts and CSA membership.

- 35 people participated in 2011
- 52 people participated in 2012

- New American farmers (including the independent refugee farmers) earned a total of \$38,397 over *four* years from 2008-2011
- New American farmers earned \$19,933.53 in *2012 alone*. (This number does not include the independent farmer totals, whose earnings are estimated at nearly \$10,000.00). The overall amount therefore for 2012 is close to \$30,000.00.

Over the course of the 2012 season (four months in total), four farmers were given scales to weigh the amount of produce they took home from the farm to feed their families. Preliminary information estimates that of the 47 farmers participating in NFNA and contributing to NMNA, producers took home nearly \$30,000.00 of organic, local produce.

Beneficiaries:

58 refugee farmers participated in the NFNA program and therefore received marketing support provided by the NMNA project. These farmers also benefited themselves by getting to take home fresh produce from the incubator farm and the independent farmers' land. During the summer of 2012, NFNA conducted a study to estimate the price value on food taken home by the 47 farmers working on the incubator farm. The results show that in addition to the \$20,000 gross income, the farmers took home an estimated total of \$30,000 in local, organic produce. The independent farmers earned a gross income of \$10,000. A more qualitative result of this program was the exposure of the New American farmers within the broader community, as hard working citizens.

Farm stands and farmers' market reached low-income and geographically marginalized households, including members of the refugee and immigrant populations. By locating the farm stands and farmers' markets within walking distance of homes and housing complexes where residents do not own vehicles or do not all have drivers licenses, the markets were an alternative to needing to take public transport.

Next year, one of the farm stands will be fully run by one of the independent farmers. Each week during the summer of 2012 she set up her produce and prepared foods next to the NMNA stand. But this venue will become hers from here on out. This is an important benefit in that it allows farmers to have their own sites and to leave the incubator farm with a specific location to set up their own business.

Lessons Learned:

After the first year, the NMNA project decided to move from a public housing location to a more high traffic and visible location where the project could simultaneously support the refugee vendors. With vendor and stakeholder feedback, the program moved to the King Street Community Center and O'Brien Community Center. Working with two well-established organizations (King Street Youth Center and O'Brien Community Center), helped the New

Markets for New Americans reach additional audiences, not solely the refugee and immigrant population, but also families and staff at the centers.

Collaborating with organizations where the relationship could be mutually beneficial helped the NMNA project by providing the farm vendors with an easily accessible space and access to a strong public relations office. In return, the farmers sold locally grown, organic food at prices affordable to the community center clients, staff and passersby, while also assuring that the stands were EBT accessible.

Another important lesson learned was the idea of a farm stand versus a farmers' market. The lack of vendors at a farm stand, resulted in overall less visibility to passersby. And while the farm stand had variety, it seemed that customers were more apt to buy when there were more vendors and therefore more options and the ability to do price comparison shopping.

Where the farm stands were a good opportunity was for the independent farmers. The farmers had an opportunity to set up a stand at no cost (since most farmers' markets have fees) and to experiment with produce displays, customer communication and price shifting. Without competitors, the independent farmers knew that they would take home some income at the end of the day.

Additional Information:

The NMNA project included several project partners, including the Intervale Center, which provided agricultural technical assistance for this project, primarily to: (1) help design the small business development, marketing, and customer relations adaptive ESL curriculum; and (2) provide guidance and connections for the creation of the New Farms for New Americans CSA. The Intervale Center also helped the NFNA become a certified organic farm during the project period.

The project also worked with Vermont Adult Learning to assist with any technical adaptive ESL questions the project had. VAL was an important part of the incubator farmers' experiences, since all these farmers were required to take ESL classes.

The NMNA project also worked closely with the Burlington Housing Authority, Winooski Housing Authority, and the City of Burlington to find suitable locations for the farm stands and to make sure that each of these locations was EBT accessible. When the project moved in its second year, it was important to maintain the existing relationship in hopes that in future years the project might be more sustainable at the original locations.

The NMNA project also hosted classes taught by staff from the Opportunities Credit Union (a local CDFI and the primary banking institution for New Americans in Vermont), the Champlain Valley Micro-business Development Program, and its partners at the Winooski Community Center. The staff also worked closely to set up bank accounts for the farmers and NFNA created a monetary match for farmers who started bank accounts with OCU.

Unexpected partners in this project were the King Street Youth Center and the O'Brien Community Center, each of which provided space and resources to launch the farm stands.

Working with these project partners had a side benefit, which was it was often mutually beneficial for them to show through their public relations branch the work that they were doing in the community to assist refugees and immigrants. By working closely with these partners, NMNA was able to benefit through their publicity. They used social media, like Facebook to promote the NMNA program, farm stands and farmers' markets through their sites. In one case, the public relations staff contacted the newspaper because it was important publicity for them.

Attachment #1

Photo of Farm Stand Sandwich Board Sign

Fresh, local

FARM STAND



Wednesdays 3pm-6pm

At **King St. Center**



3 Squares VT / EBT Welcome!

Attachment # 2

8.3.2012 Burlington Free Press Coverage of the NMNA Farm Stand at King Street Center

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/article/20120804/LIVING20/308040001/Sign-season-Old-traditions-mix-new-tastes>

Sign of the season: Old traditions mix for new tastes

3:59 PM, Aug 3, 2012



Fatuma Malande hangs her sign saying 'Somali Woman Samosa' while setting up the New Farms for New Americans stand in front of the King Street Center in Burlington on Wednesday, Aug. 1. Malande said she often runs out of much of her food by the end of the day because she has so many customers.

Written by

Catherine Boudreau

Free Press staff writer

That farm stands and markets pop up like zucchini around Vermont is a summer tradition. As immigrants and refugees make their homes here they bring their own traditions and their influence brings new flavors to some of these farm markets.

Fatuma Malande, a Somali American who immigrated to Burlington in 2005, sold homemade potato cakes, samosas and fresh produce at a farm stand at the King Street Youth Center Wednesday. The youth center has partnered with New Farms for New Americans to host a farm stand for the first time this summer.

“I love Vermont because my kids can go to school, I can go to school,” Malande said, who is taking English classes, and dons a ‘Proud parent of an honor student’ bumper sticker on her van. “It’s a small state, so not too many people, no problems.”

New Farms for New American’s is a program established by the Association of Africans Living in Vermont. This is the fifth year refugee farmers have sold their goods at a market organized by the association. About 50 households grow produce on 16 plots at the Ethan Allen Homestead, and then bring them to sell at stands in the Old North End, Winooski and now, at the King Street Youth Center.

Malande said she has many made friends farming at the Ethan Allen Homestead, and works with four other women on their plot. She names five other friends who work in different groups.

“We grow everything, everything,” Malande said. “Cucumber, squash, tomato, corn, cilantro, spinach, kale, everything.”

An outdoor market is a familiar setting for many refugees, Josie Weldon, a staff member of New Farms for New Americans, said, adding that a lot of African women prefer to sell in a direct market atmosphere.

“We decided to partner with the King Street Youth Center because they are a really dynamic organization that can help us get the word out,” Weldon said. “They can also help us reach the demographic we are trying to offer fresh produce to.”

This demographic is mainly refugees and low income residents who receive public benefits. The farm stand has Electronic Benefits Transfer machine, or EBT machine, for customers using state food benefits.

The market at the youth center also reaffirms what the center teaches children every day: how to eat healthy, Susannah Kerest, development director for The King Street Youth Center, said.

“And, when kids come out and see their parents running a successful business, its a huge confidence boost,” Kerest added.

The New Farms for New Farmers Farm stand will be at The King Street Youth Center every Wednesday from 3 to 6 p.m. through October.

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