

Growing Power, Inc., of Milwaukee, WI received **\$66,341** recruit, train, and assist small scale producers to take advantage of direct market opportunities in urban venues and to purchase marketing and packaging supplies.

[Final Report FY 10](#)



**USDA-FMPP: Agreement Number 12-25-G-1208
Final Performance Report (10/1/2010 – 9/31/2012): Submitted by Growing Power, Inc.
Milwaukee Wisconsin
“Rainbow Farmers Cooperative (RFC): Expanding Local Agricultural Economies to Grow
Sustainable Farmers”**

Project Summary: The objective of this project is to use Growing Power’s tested innovative sustainable agriculture methods, marketing/distribution mechanisms, hands-on training programs, and technical expertise to provide quality training, marketing opportunities, and mentoring programs to farmers in WI and beyond, especially for women, minorities, immigrant, transitioning, and new farmers. As a result, underserved communities experiencing food insecurities will have increased access to fresh, local, and affordable foods.

Project Approach: The RFC project increased the membership of the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative to increase the marketing power and direct marketing of agricultural products by beginning and seasoned farmers which will then improve the food security of underserved communities. Primary Project Manager, Will Allen, and Growing Power staff employed the following methods during the two year project:

- Customized multi-lingual (Hmong, Spanish, English) hands-on training in extended season and year-round production;
- Farm management consultation;
- Post-harvest handling, storage, and proper packaging training;
- Demonstrated specialty crop production in greenhouses/hoophouses;
- Risk aversion strategies through proper integrated pest management, building soil fertility, and diversifying crops;
- Marketing and distribution opportunities through the established and expanding Rainbow Farmers Cooperative and direct marketing

Goals, Outputs & Outcomes Achieved:

- Goal #1: To increase the membership and marketing strength of the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative.

The Growing Power RFC Manager distributed an updated RFC application packet to the following potential members:

- Mitchell St. Farmers Market vendors in Milwaukee;
- Growing Power’s Regional Outreach Training Center partners located in 14 states;
- Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative listserv; and

- Growing Power's 2010 and 2011 Commercial Urban Agriculture trainees;

Additionally, the RFC application was made available to all visitors of the Growing Power Community Food Center and RFC application information is listed on the Growing Power website.

The RFC Manager did have numerous inquiries from interested parties and recruited 27 new farmers to the RFC since the beginning of the grant period. We have 52 active RFC farmer members.

In 2012, Growing Power moved a portion of its operations to a warehouse space located 10 minutes from the Community Food Center in Milwaukee. The addition of this new space increases the RFC's ability to purchase and process product. The 300 + weekly Farm-to-City Market Baskets are also assembled at the warehouse. The addition of the warehouse space has allowed Growing Power to increase the amount of product purchased from RFC members, in turn allowing Growing Power to expand the RFC membership and increase Growing Power's customer base.

- Goal #2: To increase the direct marketing of agricultural products from producers to consumers in urban and rural settings.

During this grant period an additional 3 farm stands were secured throughout Milwaukee with a total of 6 farm stands operating on behalf of the Growing Power Rainbow Farmers Cooperative. Furthermore, Growing Power secured a partnership with the Mitchell Street Market Lofts group to operate a year-round market on Milwaukee's Southside.

RFC Manager coordinated with RFC members to ensure weekly delivery of RFC product to Milwaukee Public School for 2010-2011 school year. During the 10-11 school year the RFC served 22 MPS elementary schools for a total of 10,167 elementary aged students (of which 8,897 students were SNAP-eligible) served a healthy and locally grown snack from the RFC. For the 2011-2012 school year, 29 schools received produce distributed by Growing Power's Rainbow Farmers Cooperative. Furthermore, Growing Power acquired an additional 37 acres of farmland to grow produce for the RFC and distribute directly to Sysco, Milwaukee Public Schools' primary food supplier. This new partnership incorporated RFC grown food into MPS' meal program, impacting more than fresh fruit and vegetable snacks.

The Growing Power RFC strategized with a longtime partner, the local wholesaler, Maglio's, to purchase processing equipment specifically for post-harvest handling of certain RFC products. During 2011, the RFC encountered an obstacle when Sysco (the food distributor for MPS) would not purchase the promised 10,000 pounds of carrots because they had not been washed and cut as expected. As a result, the RFC was unable to sell directly to Sysco (and ultimately to MPS). However, this extended partnership with Maglio's addressed this issue and the carrots were ultimately delivered to MPS. Now, there is a system in place for processing specific RFC products to be able to provide to Sysco, and ultimately the MPS system. In addition, the Growing Power/RFC

production team has prepared 100,000 tomato plants and 150,000 pepper plants to prepare for large and consistent distribution to Sysco and then MPS.

Growing Power and the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative branch expanded its specialty crop production to include an additional 57 hoop-houses for year-round production of specialty micro-greens. In addition, Growing Power staff have diversified crops to include several strains of mushroom production, a new variety of fish (blue gills), and new varieties of herbs. Growing Power and the Rainbow Farmers Cooperative branch grew micro-greens, sprouts, vegetables, and raise fish (100,000), hens (450+), turkeys, ducks, bees (10 hives), dairy goats, (40), soldier fly larvae, and worms at our 2.5 acre urban farm site. On average, 12,000 pounds of sprouts are grown annually, not including the salad mix and larger vegetables. This averages out to harvesting and processing 1,000 10 in. X 20 in. trays per week. The micro-green tray production has doubled to 2,000 trays/week (about .5 lb of micro-green per tray) equaling over 1,000 pounds of micro-greens weekly for distribution alone. Coupled with our other production, Growing Power is averaging over one million pounds of food grown annually.

- Goal #3: To increase the food security of underserved communities.

Socially disadvantaged producers from the RFC participated in the Annual GFJI Gathering in September, 2011 and the GFJI Intensive Leadership and Facilitation Training in Chicago, December 7-9, 2012. Attendees of both of these trainings explored: examples of institutional and structural racism and how it operates, also how to address, challenge and change it; practical applications of facilitating change and becoming a change agent, including some personal identification to understand the kind of facilitator you are; and opportunity to explore individual role in the anti-racism process of your work with the opportunity to strategize with others to develop an action plan for next steps that can be put into motion upon your return to home. In total 418 people attended the 2011 event and 40 people attended the 2012 event.

Growing Power held the National-International Urban & Small Farm Conference in Milwaukee, September 7-9 2012. Attendees came from all over the world to learn about urban aquaculture, animal husbandry in an urban setting, rooftop farming, food security, indoor food production, community outreach, marketing, nutrition and fundraising. The conference offers several learning tracks covering topics such as aquaculture, youth, education, fundraising, food policy, culinary arts, food and justice, community outreach, urban crops and renewable resources. The 2012 conference was attended by more than 750 people, 114 of which are RFC member farmers and our Regional Outreach Training Centers (ROTC). ROTCs, which are located in 14 states and are typically located in socially disadvantaged areas, receive scholarship funding to attend this conference.

Socially disadvantaged producers also have access to the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative's (GFJI) listserv via the GFJI website. The listserv serves as an arena for producers to network with Growing Power staff, other producers and current and

potential customers. The listserv also creates a method to receive feedback from conference participants.

GFJI also holds monthly Community Education and Exchange Call-ins for members of the GFJI listserv. Calls cover topics such as dismantling racism, current policies and proposed state and congressional bills that may affect participants and any other topics that may be of assistance to participants. These calls were held the last Wednesday of each month.

- Goal #4: To increase the number of farmers and producers in the marketplace with a focus on low-income, socially disadvantaged populations.

Growing Power conducted monthly weekend-long workshop trainings January – April 2011 and 2012. “From the Ground Up!” workshops are intensive, hand-on trainings offering diverse groups the opportunity to learn, plan, develop, operate, and sustain community food projects. Workshop participants leave with improved agriculture skills that they can take back into their communities and pass on to others. The following breakout sessions are designed for both rural and urban farm projects:

- Living Biological Worm Systems & Compost
- Aquaculture
- Bee Keeping
- Community Project Design
- Year-round Greenhouse Production
- Hoop House Construction
- Mycoscaping
- Renewable Energy

Growing Power recruited RFC members to participate in the workshop series both in 2011 and 2012. We also offered scholarships to those that cannot afford to attend the workshops on their own. In 2012, several of the Mitchell Street Farmers Market vendors attended our workshops on a scholarship.

We also offered Hmong interpretation during our January 2012 weekend workshop. Wisconsin has the second highest Hmong population concentration in the United States. Many of the vendors at our local farmers markets are Hmong. This workshop was highly utilized and proved to be successful. We plan to offer this option again in the future.

In total 391 people participated in the 2011 workshop series and 465 people participated in the 2012 workshop series.

Beneficiaries: During the grant period Growing Power reached:

- 52 active RFC farmer members
- 856 “From the Ground Up!” workshop attendees
- 1020 attendees of the Bi-Annual National-International Urban & Small Farm Conference
- 418 attendees of the Annual GFJI Gathering
- 40 attendees of the GFJI Intensive Leadership and Facilitation Training

- 300+ households that receive a weekly Farm-to-City Market Basket

Additionally, consumers of our produce also benefited from this program. They gained access to affordable, local, sustainable and healthy food.

Lessons Learned: The Growing Power RFC Manager and staff did not encounter any major problems or delays. The primary challenge was securing funds for large equipment purchases, i.e., refrigerated trucks for storage/delivery, agricultural equipment for production, etc. As Growing Power's RFC accounts grew and the production by Growing Power drastically increased, we realized the need for larger processing facilities. The addition of the warehouse space has helped tremendously with processing more product and reaching more customers.

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