

Improving Farmers Market Connections to Low-Income Families, Senior Citizens and Children through Innovative Educational Programs

Wes-Mon-Ty RC&D of Philippi, WV, received \$10,000 to increase farmers market participation in West Virginia by low-income families, seniors and school children by way of a comprehensive program of EBT implementation, advertising and promotion, school lesson plans, chef demonstrations, and social worker education. Funds were used to develop a pilot project to accept EBT at farmers markets; reimburse \$1 vouchers for incentives to use EBT; set up a hotline for markets; sponsor market events; develop a website; produce videos and teacher lesson plans for school wellness programs; demonstrate cooking with fresh produce; and train social workers and new farmers.

Final Report

G-0767 Final Report

A summary of the issue(s) being examined

The issues that this grant examined were: lack of access to farmers market by low-income SNAP participants; lack of participation at farmers markets by both producers and consumers; lack of knowledge among low-income residents about farmers markets and the benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption; lack of capacity among farmers markets to advertise and adopt EBT technology; lack of redemption of WIC coupons and Senior Vouchers at farmers markets; lack of information on how to prepare fresh produce.

Descriptions of how the issue(s) was addressed

Several farmers markets were equipped with the appropriate technology to accept EBT for SNAP benefits. The Community Garden Market in Philippi was the first farmers market in the state to accept SNAP benefits, and it continues to be popular at the market. The Elkins Farmers Market was able to acquire tokens for the single point of sale, hold cooking demonstrations on site and generate materials for marketing the weekly farmers market. South Morgantown Farmers Market was able to submit advertisements in the local paper that increased traffic at the market while promoting EBT. Further, they were able to purchase an EBT machine, and tokens that were used for redemption of SNAP benefits. West Virginia University Extension held cooking demonstrations at the South Morgantown farmers market. These demonstrated how to use the fresh produce available. A very popular event demonstrated how to make apple butter and a low-fat apple dessert. At all three farmers markets mentioned money was used to place weekly advertisements in the local newspapers. These helped to increase traffic at the market and increased awareness about the acceptance of EBT at the market.

The money was used to sponsor several different cooking demonstrations. West Virginia University Extension was contracted to hold several cooking demonstrations at farmers markets in Morgantown. Also a community cooking demonstration was held at the Chestnut Ridge Community Center outside of Philippi, WV. Chestnut Ridge is an extremely underserved community in rural Appalachia.

The money also provided for canning equipment that will be used by WVU extension and WesMonTy RC&D in future canning classes.

Results, accomplishments, conclusions, and lessons learned

Three video's were produced and distributed that promote farmers markets in West Virginia. These videos have proven popular among partner organizations working on the local food issue as well as with farmers markets that are looking for a visual promotion. These video's, which are on the WesMonTy RC&D vimeo page will

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continue to be a favorite and provide inspiration.
(<http://www.vimeo.com/user5440789>)

Posters were created with the assistance of Buy Fresh, Buy Local, WV and were placed in several area schools to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables among the students. These posters have also been used throughout the communities to advertise for the area farmers market.

Cooking demonstrations were held at several area farmers markets and at the Chestnut Ridge Community Center. The South Morgantown Farmers Market and the Elkins farmers market both used funds to demonstrate the preparation of fresh foods available at those markets. These cooking demonstrations included sampling and giveaways. The cooking demonstration in the underserved community of Chestnut Ridge was a success (<http://wesmontyrcd.org/blog/page/4>). We had 7 adult attendees and 12 children. The adults learned to can food safely, and they received recipes to take home. The children assisted with cleaning the vegetables and making some food of their own including an apple dip. At the Chestnut Ridge cooking demonstration, video was taken that was included in the PSA's.

The Doddridge County, Upshur County and Weston Tailgate Farmers Markets and the Community Garden Market in Barbour County were all provided with a year membership to Buy Fresh, Buy Local, WV. The purchase of this membership will allow them to utilize marketing and branding materials that made their market more visible to the public. It also connects them to a support network of other farmers markets that will increase traffic and opportunities. Additionally, these four markets were provided with EBT machines that allow them to accept SNAP benefits from low-income consumers. This is important in the project area, which has a high rate of poverty and SNAP participation.

A workshop was held for community workers and health care professionals. The workshop was a result of planning and collaboration among NGOs charged with serving limited resource and at-risk residents, the West Virginia Extension Service, WesMonTy RC&D and the West Virginia Farmers Market Association. A survey of community workers defined areas of interest and need regarding their clients' access to local foods and determined training needs. The agenda was tailored to orient community and social workers regarding farmer's market operations and locations as well as the benefits and logistics of obtaining and using locally produced foods.

The workshop was held April 23, 2009 and was attended by over 40 health care professionals and social workers. Presentations addressed the logistics of farmers markets in the region, considerations of health and nutrition and ways to better connect their clients to local foods. A brochure, agenda and example materials from the workshop are attached. Participants and presenters alike came away with a better understanding of the benefits of; and the challenges to connecting limited resource residents to local foods. In the collaboration leading up to the workshop and continuing since; the affordability and availability of local food has come to the forefront in connecting people to food. These two issues will likely be the most

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limiting factors in widespread acceptance and use of local foods by lower income and, for that matter; middle income citizens.

The major outcome of this workshop was to cement working relations and create linkage between service providers, organizations promoting better diet and healthier lifestyles and farmers' market promotion interests. Follow up meetings have been held among the partners to plan outreach directed at limited resource individuals, especially those with small children. A key focus has been how to leverage financial benefits and insure that local foods are easily accessible and that the shopping experience was not intimidating to target audience.

These meetings and discussions lead to the next milestone of this outreach objective and also an activity that directly supports EBT and cooking demonstrations objectives noted below. An event was held on September 21st in Philippi, WV. The event combined the use of public transportation, a visit to a particularly affordable market that accepts EBTs and a cooking demonstration carried out with food available at the market the day of the visit. Working with Family Options Providers and the local transit system in Harrison County, 10 clients met at Wal-Mart in Clarksburg (a destination of region transit) and then rode a transit bus to the a church in Philippi with a large commercial quality kitchen. Upon arrival, the visitors were met by a Nutritional Outreach Instructor (NOI) of the West Virginia Extension Services Family Nutrition Program. There are NOIs in most West Virginia counties that are responsible for carrying out a local program designed to instill better nutrition and changes in diet through education and demonstration. NOIs are specifically are selected from local residents familiar to clients to increase trust and interaction.

At the start of our event, the NOI passed out recipes for the planned meal, explained what was needed and then put the visitors to work preparing their own lunch providing hands-on experience in the kitchen. Picture so the activity and recipes are attached following this narrative. Representatives of partnering organizations were also present and joined the visitors for lunch. Promotion materials for local foods and healthy snack suggests for children were passed out. Next participants went to the market a few blocks away where the visitors were able to shop for local foods and use their EBT cards. The group then returned to the church for a short discussion, door prices and a brief survey about their experiences. Results of the survey are summarized as one of the attachments. Project partners were extremely pleased about the turnout and success of the event. The availability of NOIs and public transit in the most counties in the project region will be used to facilitate future market visits with the approach providing the model for this and other projects.

Beneficiaries

South Morgantown Farmers Market, Doddridge County Farmers Market, Elkins Farmers Market serve a total population of 75,156 people. Of that, at 17.6% poverty, an estimated 4,270 people are eligible to benefit from these projects. That is 4,270 more people that can purchase healthy, local produce from their farmers market than previously could.

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The Tygart Valley Growers Association was formed due to the efforts of this grant. This is a group of 12 area producers that meet monthly to discuss issues of marketing, planting, and education. Through the cooperative education of this group, over \$100,000 in federal funds were received in USDA NRCS EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) contracts. This will result in a major influx of healthy, local, year-round produce being available to area consumers.

Further Information

Further information on the Tygart Valley Growers Association can be found here: wesmontyrcd.org/tvga

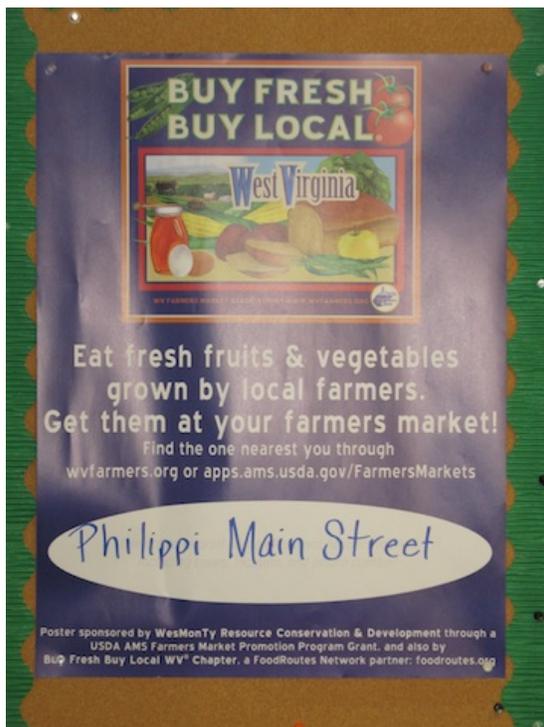
The WesMonTy RC&D website can be found here:

www.wesmontyrcd.org

The WesMonTy RC&D Blog containing articles on FMPP project deliverables can be found here:

www.wesmontyrcd.org/blog

Pictures from the cooking demonstration on Chestnut Ridge:



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Specific contributions of project partners

WesMonTy was the sole organization implementing this grant.

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Three videos produced under the grant

<http://www.vimeo.com/user5440789/videos>