

FMPP Final Performance Report

Report Number/Period: *September 30, 2014 – September 29, 2016*

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Recipient Name: Cherry Street Farmer's Market
Project Title: Increasing Sales for Cherry Street Farmers' Market
Grant Number: 14-FMPPX-OK-0140 OK-226
Project Location: Tulsa, OK
Year of the Grant Award: 2014
Total Awarded Budget: \$ 93,774

Program Summary

Our goal with the grant project was to increase sales for vendors in two ways. By increasing market access for area consumers and by providing education to our vendors that would assist in improving their own marketing and selling efforts.

We worked toward this goal by initiating a Food Hub that included an online portal so that people could buy directly from farmers outside of market hours; by hiring an Outreach Coordinator to connect vendors with important resources and education; by presenting workshop for our vendors; by implementing an intensive marketing campaign to promote our market and our food programs; and by providing a new transportation program to drive residents who live in an underserved area of Tulsa that is considered a “food desert” to the market on Saturdays.

The primary beneficiaries were our farmers’ market vendors as well as area consumers who gained access to the market or who learned of and benefited from our food programs. Collaborators included local restaurants, the Oklahoma Farm and Food Alliance, the Oklahoma Food Security Summit and the Department of Human Services.

Our most impressive result was a 6.1% increase in credit/debit card sales at the market in 2016 over 2015.

Goals and Objectives

The outcomes we proposed for this grant included: increased sales for vendors; increased market access for populations with limited resources or difficulty getting to the market; increased use of SNAP, Double Up Food Bucks and Senior Nutrition programs (for

customers with limited financial resources); and improved vendor skills in marketing, booth operations, social media usage and grant writing.

We initially applied for this grant after identifying several needs. We found that local restaurants and businesses were wanting to purchase more local food but found it inconvenient to purchase on Saturday mornings. We also found that most of our customer base was upper middle class residents who lived in the neighborhoods nearest our market. We wanted to address these needs by creating a new way for businesses to purchase through our Food Hub and by bringing new customers to our market from broader areas of Tulsa. We also saw that our vendors needed assistance in learning to market themselves. Many of them did not practice beneficial booth presentation and did not have their own social media presence. Furthermore, after surveying our vendors we found they were very interested in being connected to resources, especially grants.

Activities

1. Implemented a Food Hub that included an internet portal where purchasers could buy directly from our farmers online. Relationships were established with area restaurants to purchase local food. Farmers were assisted in learning to grow and sell on a wholesale level. Direct relationships were established between farmers and wholesale purchasers.
2. Hired an Outreach Coordinator who acted as a “connector” for our vendors. She attended market days and spoke with vendors one-on-one to ask what their needs were and made a concerted effort to assist them.

After the termination of our Food Hub, the Coordinator continued to connect vendors with wholesale purchasers. For example, she facilitated a conversation between a honey and dairy vendor with Whole Foods and she arranged the sale of 80lbs of tomatoes and 30lbs of spinach to an area restaurant by one of our Hmong vendors who does not speak fluent English.

She also connected vendors with important resources and information. As a long-time local food advocate, our Outreach Coordinator had access to a wealth of resources for our vendors. In addition to providing direction to helpful websites or other written information on farming regulations, organic certification, available grants and interesting classes she also arranged for vendors to attend conferences that would help their businesses. These included:

- Specialty Crop and Food Safety Workshop
- Holistic Management Whole Farm Ranch Planning
- Organic Oklahoma Conference
- Women in Ag & Small Business Conference
- The Oklahoma Compost Conference
- Mushroom Cultivation & Application Workshop

- Soil Health Workshop
- NRCS Seasonal High Tunnel Workshop 101
- OFRA Improving Land Health & Managed Grazing
- Horticulture Industry Show Conference
- Peanut and Sweet Potato Digging Agenda
- The Oklahoma Food Security Summit which presented an aquaponics workshop and a permaculture tour.

Some vendors received mileage reimbursement to attend certain conferences.

She served on several important planning committees as another way to advocate for our vendors including the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Conference, the Oklahoma Food Security Summit and the Horticulture Industries Show committees.

The Outreach Coordinator also served as a representative on a state-wide committee to fund and operate the Double-Up Food Bucks (DUFB) program for markets across Oklahoma. DUFB encourages Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to shop at the farmers' market by providing a dollar for dollar match for SNAP funds spent on produce (doubling the buying potential for recipients and doubling sales for our vendors). Our coordinator assisted this committee in applying for and receiving the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant which will provide support for the DUFB program. Because of her work with this committee, we expect to see a surge in SNAP spending at our market over the next two years.

To address an ongoing issue between our vendors and frequently changing rules of the local health department, our coordinator hosted a roundtable discussion between the vendors, the State Department of Health and the Oklahoma State University Food and Ag Product Center.

There was an ongoing issue that our vendors sought clarification on for several years regarding whether they were to submit sales tax for items sold at the market. Our Outreach Coordinator collaborated with a State Representative, his Legislative Assistant, and the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Tax Commission to provide a written Sales Tax Directive to our producers exempting them from sales tax collection. She arranged a panel with OK Representative Seneca Scott to present the Sales Tax Directive at the Oklahoma Food Security Summit. This was a major accomplishment. As one of our vendors said to the coordinator, "You have just earned me a raise, I am so grateful for all that you have done."

She also worked to create community partnerships. For instance, she partnered with Community Nutrition Educators and Tulsa County Extension Services to assist Educare preschool parents who are largely Latino with orientation to the farmers' market. English translation was provided as needed, tours were organized for first-time visits and nutritional tips and recipes were provided for Ok grown fruits and vegetables.

She also partnered with Oklahoma Nutrition & Information Education (ONIE), an organization that works closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS). In 2015 DHS mailed DUFB flyers for the market to approximately 65,000 SNAP households. A massive \$45 million budget cut prevented DHS from doing the same in 2016. However, ONIE worked closely with DHS to mail 12,000 post cards to targeted zip codes for the farmers' market. ONIE also assisted with advertising, social media and press releases statewide.

3. We sent six attendees to the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Mobile, AL.
4. We sent three attendees to the Local Orbit Food Hub Camp in Denver, CO.
5. We hosted a grant writing workshop for our vendors called *Grants for Farmers: Where to Find Them and How to Apply*. The workshop presented comprehensive information on what grants are available for farmers as well as step-by-step instructions on how to apply for a DUNS number, utilize grants.gov and how to prepare grant applications. The workshop was organized by our Coordinator and taught by a professional grant writer with over 10 years of grant writing experience. Ongoing individual assistance in applying for grants was offered by our Outreach Coordinator.
6. We provided a marketing workshop for our vendors in conjunction with our annual meeting to ensure that every vendor was in attendance. The workshop, taught by an Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture Tourism representative, provided information on how to increase sales through improved customer engagement/booth presentation as well as how to utilize social media marketing tools.
7. We implemented an intensive marketing plan that included the printing and distribution of fliers about our market and our DUFB program in both English and Spanish; print, radio and television advertising; professional videos; a website update; and promotional logo items.
8. We partnered with a Tulsa church and a social justice ministry to organize transportation to market every other Saturday for residents of one of Tulsa's underserved neighborhoods that is widely known as a food desert.

Accomplishments

Our overall goal was to increase sales for our market vendors. Because we do not require vendors to submit their totals, we utilize other metrics to track increases or decreases in sales including amounts of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Double Up Food Bucks Program (DUFB), Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), and debit/credit card transactions which are run through the market manager's booth.

Results (below) show an overall increase in sales in 2016 over 2015 of 2.1% with the largest increase demonstrated in basic credit/debit card transactions. We saw a much

smaller increase in SNAP sales and a decrease in DUFB and SFMNP. We believe the reason for the decrease in DUFB was due to an unforeseen delay in funding for the program. Because we moved from utilizing personal contacts with local foundations for program funding to a state-wide grant submission for funding from a federal source, we could not begin marketing the program strongly until we were assured we had received the grant. Although we did market DUFB, we were already a month into the market season before we could do so. With two years of funding now secured for DUFB, we believe we will see an increase in 2017 and 2018 sales.

We did see a healthy increase in credit/debit card sales, demonstrating that the intensive marketing campaign to the general public funded by FMPP did have a strong impact.

	2015	2016	
SNAP	\$25,759	\$26,430	2.6% increase
DUFB	\$22,240	21,757	2.2% decrease
SFMNP	\$18,610	\$16,940	9% decrease
Debit/Credit Cards	\$71,931	\$76,352	6.1% increase
Total	\$138,540.00	\$141,479.00	2.1% increase

Although the Food Hub was only in operation for one season, we did bring in a total of **\$11,615.19 in Food Hub sales over the life of the program for vendors over and above what they sold at the regular market** that year (this number is not represented in graph above). An additional benefit of the Food Hub was to create new and lasting partnerships between local restaurants and vendors. Nine vendors have continued to sell either directly to the restaurants or through another food aggregate after the closure of the Hub.

Beyond sales, many market vendors participated and benefited from education and resources organized by our Outreach Coordinator.

Six vendors benefited from a wealth of information provided at the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Conference. One vendor who attended a session on GAP certification at the conference was motivated to become certified as a GAP auditor. She is now a new valuable resource for our state. Another farmer sat in on a mushroom cultivation session which inspired him to pursue it further. He followed through by attending a mushroom class in Oklahoma.

Three vendors attended a course in mushroom cultivation with assistance from the grant. Several years ago, the market's only mushroom vendor passed away. Since then, we've had countless requests for mushrooms but have not found a vendor with the knowledge or skills to take on this crop. The three vendors who attended the workshop came home with all the information necessary to start selling mushrooms on a market level. At this point,

only one of the vendors is now cultivating mushrooms but one other is planning to do so next year.

Two vendors attended the Women in Ag & Small Business Conference with assistance from the grant. One vendor reported being inspired by the conference to find ways to invite children to the farm through 4H and FFA involvement. Another vendor reported that she has since implemented new livestock handling practices learned from the conference and was inspired to build a hoop house.

Two vendors also attended the Oklahoma Farmers' Market Conference where they learned more about how to promote themselves and increase their market success.

We organized and presented a grant writing workshop funded by the grant. Twelve vendors representing eight different farms were in attendance. Reviews from two vendors listed below...

“Thanks again to you and Rose for the grant writing workshop. Very informative. Rose did a good job of covering the bases in a timely manner. It was also quite helpful having it scheduled right after the market so no one had to make an extra trip to Tulsa.”

“I found the Grants for Farmers workshop very informative and well done. The power point and Rose's excellent articulations of her own experience we're extremely helpful. Double gold star for all of you! Much much gratitude to Rose who shared her insight and everyone else who participated.”

We organized and presented a marketing workshop funded by the grant. Because we scheduled it in conjunction with our annual vendor meeting, we had over 70 vendors in attendance. Although we do not have any measurable outcomes for this, our Outreach Coordinator said she personally observed that displays improved and prices and signs for DUFB/SNAP were more visibly posted.

In preparation for the establishment of our Food Hub, we sent three board members to a Food Hub Camp, an intensive experience designed to provide the basics of initiating food hubs in new cities. This information proved invaluable and was implemented in every stage of our own Food Hub. In the end, after looking at the sales numbers, we realized we would not be able to afford to support the business long-term. It was a pilot program and we learned a great deal from it. The positive element is the great partnerships we made with restaurants that will continue to benefit the market. We also received a good amount of public attention for having tried the pilot program and we feel this has helped to inform the community that we're a nonprofit and we're making an effort to increase the livelihood of our local farmers as well as promote the cause of local, healthy foods.

As part of our marketing push:

We designed, printed and distributed Double Up Food Bucks flyers w/Spanish translation to the following:

- 26,400 -Tulsa Health Department to WIC offices
- 20,000-Ok Farm and Food Guide inserted in The Tulsa Voice
- 4400 - Northeastern Food Bank of Oklahoma
- 7,000 - Tulsa Public Schools Summer Feeding Program
- 3,000-Oklahoma Eagle, African American owned Newspaper
- 3,000-LaSemana, Spanish Community Newspaper
- 700 - Broken Arrow Public Schools Summer Feeding Program
- 700 - Union Public Schools Summer Feeding Program
- 2200 -LaSemana Spanish English Newspaper
- 1200-Five farmers markets
- 300 – Kendal Whittier and Martin Regional Libraries
- 300-Community Service Council
- 300-Morton Healthcare
- 300- North Tulsa Tisdale Clinic
- 300- Community Health Connection
- 300- Healthy Community Store Initiative
- 300- Tulsa Food Security Council
- 600-Lewis & Clark Elementary School
- 300- TSET Healthy Living Coalition

We also focused our marketing efforts on digital and social media outlets in a way that we had not previously been able to do. We hired a new designer to update our website (tulsafarmersmarket.org) and to add individual pages for each farm with descriptions and contact info. We invested in a Facebook ad push. We also invested in professional videos that can be used online for marketing and in community presentations. These videos are at the following links:

<https://vimeo.com/188452716>

<https://vimeo.com/188343432>

<https://vimeo.com/166573164>

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7xPA8JGOfDOUTZCZDNrWjJ1WjA>

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7xPA8JGOfDOMDlsSmNoNUQyeE0>

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7xPA8JGOfDObFhOQlczeURLcGM>

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7xPA8JGOfDOQjJPRW1uc2g4clE>

Additionally, with our marketing budget we purchased logo items such as shirts, aprons and bags. We gave logo aprons to each vendor to wear in their booth and used other items for promotion at the market and other events such as the American Airlines Earth Day Event. We also bought new signs and banners for the market, which were desperately needed as our older signs were no longer adequate. We purchased four weeks of ads in the Tulsa World newspaper as well as radio and television spots.

We also arranged new and interesting promotions such as a scavenger hunt for kids and an “I love my farmers market because...” campaign.

Our partnership with All Souls Unitarian Church and A Third Place, a social justice ministry to provide transportation to the market for those who live in Tulsa's food desert brought 80 residents over the span of the season to the market every other Saturday.

Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiaries as intended with this grant project were the vendors of the farmers' market. Small farm businesses struggle to compete with inexpensive industrial foods that can be purchased at the grocery store.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service Oklahoma Field Office, the majority of Oklahoma farmers report less than \$10,000 income a year and the number of farms in Oklahoma has declined each year for the past five years. It was our intention with this grant to provide as much of a boost in business for our farmers either through our own direct marketing or in providing resources and education that would lead to long-term success for our vendors.

Lessons Learned

We learned a number of valuable lessons, especially in the implementation and eventual closing of our Food Hub. Although the Food Hub did provide benefit to our vendors for the time it was in operation, upon careful analysis we determined it was not benefiting enough of our vendors to justify its continuation and that it would not be possible to sustain the project long-term without expanding the scope of the business outside of our nonprofit mission.

We found that Tulsa restaurants and even schools and other institutions were very interested in purchasing local food from our farmers. However, we had difficulties in finding enough farmers to grow on a scale large enough to meet the demand. Except for a couple of farms, we were mostly filling small niche orders. We realized it would take a much larger effort to bring our farmers on board to a wholesale model than we could sustain. We closed the Food Hub after one season in order to refocus our attention and resources on areas that would have a larger impact such as marketing.

Another lesson we learned in operating the Food Hub was in hiring. We had initially wanted a person who could run the Hub as well as perform outreach for our vendors. This was too much to ask one person to fulfill and it required different skill sets. The person we initially hired was perfect for the job of Food Hub operations because he was formerly a farmer and understood the practicalities and logistics of wholesale sales. However, we needed a person with a completely different set of skills for the Outreach Coordinator position. After discontinuing the Hub we hired a woman who had many years of food advocacy experience and who was a known "people person" to fulfill the outreach duties. In the end, although it was an unexpected change to have hired two different people for two different tasks, it ended up being one of the best decisions we made within the scope

of the grant project. We found that a certain amount of flexibility is necessary when planning and implementing grant projects as large as this one. When you find that you need to take a new direction, you do so as efficiently as possible.

We also learned of the willingness and desire for our vendors to have greater contact with our staff. Before the grant project, our Market Manager and Administrator were not able to spend time with vendors one-on-one because their other duties did not leave time for it. Our grant funded Outreach Coordinator spoke with vendors at every market and was able to answer questions for them and connect them to more resources than we can list in this report. She found them eager for information and eager for interaction. To meet this ongoing need our board of directors is discussing new ideas to be in contact with vendors and provide ongoing information for them.

Finally, we believe one of the strongest impacts of this grant has been the partnerships we've made that will be ongoing. With the Food Hub we were able to engage restaurants and introduce them to our farmers. Chefs have since become great supporters of our market and have provided support for our annual fundraising dinner and have continued to purchase from farmers. We also created new partnership with social services organizations who are eager to support our Double Up Food Bucks program as well as our new transportation program. Because we had the resources to reach out and let the community know of the great community services we offer, we've attracted support that will benefit the market and our vendors for many years to come.