

Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report
For the Period of October 1, 2015 – November 30, 2017

Date: December 22, 2017
Recipient Name: Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York: NOFA-NY
Project Title: The interactive Organic and Sustainably Grown Farm and Food Directory: Connecting Consumers with Local Farmers of Organic and Sustainably Grown Food
Grant Number: 14-FMPPX-NY-0130
Project Location: Farmington, NY
Year of Grant Award: 2014
Amount Awarded: \$95,020
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Programm Summary: The purpose of this grant is to connect the farmer and the consumer using various methods and tools. This was accomplished through an online farmer directory, social media and web strategies training, and the creation of the price index for organic and sustainable agricultural products.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal #1 – Enable consumers in all regions of New York State to easily find farmers who are selling local, organic and sustainably grown food direct to consumers in their region via a mobile optimized directory.

Goal #2- Promote the use of the interactive directory as a way to find locally grown, organic and sustainable farm products direct to consumers.

Goal #3 - Educate farmers who sell local, organic and sustainably grown food directly to consumers on effective use of social media and web strategies to reach their customer base.

Goal #4 - Develop and provide a price index to enable farmers to better assess and price their products for the market or markets in their region.

Activities:

Goal 1/Activity 1: Design and implement a mobile optimized interactive farm directory on the NOFA-NY web site, to include local organic and sustainable farmers selling directly to consumers. This will include engaging a consultant (Mason Digital) to design and program the directory via a search module for Drupal CMS utilizing Google maps. Search logic will be programmed by zip code for category choices such as CSA, farm stand, farm market, and You-pick, by type of product (fruit, vegetables, eggs, poultry, etc.), or on other services such as farmers accepting EBT. Analytics will be integrated to track the visitors to the directory who subsequently click on a link to a specific farm web site.

Goal 1/Activity 2: Engage farmers who market direct to consumers in participating in the interactive directory. This includes outreach to farmers in the current Food and Farm Guide via presentations at the NOFA-NY 2015 and 2016 Winter Conferences, a direct mail and email campaign to verify information for the initial launch of the interactive directory and updating the directory throughout the year including additions, deletions and changes throughout the year.

Goal 2/Activity 1: Design and implement a cohesive social media strategy to compliment the interactive directory and provide outreach to potential consumers. This will include Mason Digital's review of the current landscape and efforts of similar organizations, definition of social media objectives based on overall business and marketing objectives, an outline of the social media and content strategy for 2015-2016, a definition of the focus platforms (Facebook, Twitter, etc) tactical recommendations specific to each chosen platform, and a measurement plan and definition of key performance indicators.

Goal 2/Activity 2: Implement the social media strategy including ongoing reporting and monitoring. This includes Mason Digital training the Marketing Coordinator on use of each platform, implementation and training NOFA-NY staff on measurement tools, routine meetings to monitor results, and optimization of content based on key social media metrics.

Goal 2/Activity 3: Design and implement a "click to mail" postcard mailing targeting key social service organizations in low income and low food access census tracts to raise awareness of the interactive directory in these areas. The design of the postcard will include a QR code that will enable recipients to scan and access the directory immediately using a smartphone and will provide the web address for the directory. The postcard mailings will target organizations in underserved areas where individuals may congregate such as libraries and social service organizations.

Goal 3/Activity 1: Provide a webinar based social media and web marketing educational program at least once by Spring 2016. The consultant will design and present a webinar that is customized to focus on the farmer's audience and objectives utilizing best practices and case studies as well as discussion topics and materials.

Goal 4/Activity 1: Build the required data base and data collection tools to collect, analyze, and report price information from farmers on the NOFA-NY web site.

Accomplishments:

- **Goal 1:** The directory was fully deployed last billing period, activity has moved on to monitoring performance and ongoing promotion of the tool.
 - **Goal 2:** Successful completion of our social media training has allowed for targeted social media campaigns to promote the interactive directory as a marketing tool for our farmers through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The interactive directory is prominently displayed on our website and it is continually updated as more farmers are added to the directory.
 - **Goal 3:** At the end of January 2016, the webinar titled “Social Media Best Practices for Farmers & Producers” was produced with the help of Mason Digital’s Social Media Specialist, Gavin Thomas. This webinar has 3 main sections 1) What is Social Media 2) Social Media Best Practices and 3) Guiding Principles for Farming Social Media. The focus is to provide an increase interaction among farmers and their consumer utilizing social media as a marketing tool for farmers. The social media training link was printed on post cards and distributed at the 2016 NOFA-NY winter conference, the 2016 Dairy Conference, and 2016 annual Farm Show. As of 09/30/17 there has been 241 views.
 - **Goal 4:** The price index was developed and launched with programming support from Mason Digital Marketing during August of 2015. Continued focus on product pricing and the used of the Price Index was supported through social media 17 Organic Market Updates and Enews posts. In addition, during the 2016 NOFA-NY Winter Conference, Robert Hadad, Cornell University and Paul Loomis, NOFA-NY held a seminar title “Pricing with the Price Index and other Tools” on Saturday January 23. The workshop was a focus on product pricing to maximize profit potential. Thirty-Three (33) participants were provided information to help them price their products competitively based on information available from the Price Index within their region of the state, by product type. As of September 30th 2017 the Price Index has pricing data for 158 Agricultural products including fruits, vegetables, herbs, mushrooms, poultry and eggs, lamb, pork and beef. In addition to the training session at the 2016 NOFA Winter Conference, two field days were conducted on behalf of the pricing and marketing initiatives. Total number of registered users for the Price Index is 522.
 - **Field Day One-** On Wednesday July 20, 2016 –Mainstreet Farms in Cortland, NY hosted the event “Small/Mid-sized farms moving into Wholesale Markets” in which 5 participants attended. The social media/price index promotion cards were distributed. The fundamentals for crossing over into whole sale markets, from record keeping to timing crops were discussed. The field day was held at Mainstreet Farm since their stated objectives are to bring health, local food to the community.
- *Addition of third party data input capability has allowed for an increase of of pricing information, the column provides any registered personal to collect and input data into the Price Index.

Beneficiaries

On-line Food and Farm Directory:

Farms listed in online directory: 760

Total visits from September 30- March 31: 5,080 visits from 4,401 unique visitors

Click throughs/referrals to farmer websites: 3,661 Click throughs to 256 unique farm websites

Click through rate: 72% of visitors click through to a farm website from our online Directory

Social Media Strategy

Total Facebook "Likes" as of April 2015: 4,640

Total Facebook "Likes" as of September 30, 2015: 5,119

Total Facebook "Likes" as of March 31, 2016: 5,724

Total Facebook "Likes" as of September 30, 2016: 6,551

Total Facebook "Likes" as of November 30, 2017: 7,516

Average posts per week: 20

Average "reach" per post: 902 views

Promotions of Farms using #farmsinfocus: 11 posts

Average "reach" per #farminfocus post: 355

Average click through/referrals to farmer websites from #farmsinfocus: 10

Additional reach through #farmsinfocus includes 30 Instagram posts

Price Index

Price Index users as of Sept 30th: 86

Price Index users as of March 30th: 211

Price Index users as of November 30th: 516

Subscribers to the New York Organic Market Update: 579

New York Organic Market Update open rate: averages 30%

Organic Market updates from October 1 2015 to March 30 2016: 12

Listed Products on Price Index with data: 141

Lessons Learned:

The launch of the webinar based social media and web marketing education program coincided with the renovation of our company website. The timing was such that the webinar, the new website launch and the NOFA-NY Winter Conference 2016 overlapped so there was diminished attention on the webinar and its availability as an on line tool. Subsequently, the webinar was embedded in our resource page on the website: <https://www.nofany.org/social-media-strategy>. Additional focus has been given to the webinar through social media informational postings. The distribution of a click-to-mail card with information regarding the price index as well as the social media training webinar was distributed at the Winter Conference, the Dairy Conference, the Farm Show and other tabling events. Two (2) field days are being planned during next quarter which will focus on farmer marketing strategies utilizing social media, directing farmers and consumers to the price index and the social media training webinar.

Price Index: Using a farmer driven price index presented a challenge with participation. By utilizing incentives and the third party data collection abilities, we have been able to populate more pricing data in to the index.