

***Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report***
For the Period of September 30, 2014 –

September 29, 2016

Date: 22-Dec-16
Recipient Name: Faith in Place
Project Title: Leveraging Faith-Based interests and networks to promote markets and provide access for CSAs
Grant Number: 14-FMPPX-IL-0060 IL-286
Project Location: Chicago, IL
Year of Grant Award: 2014
Amount Awarded: \$63,910
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Program Summary:

The goals of this program were to increase awareness, attendance, and sales for local farmers and vendors at the Winter Farmers Markets held indoors at houses of worship and organized by Faith in Place. Additionally, our goal was to provide producers and CSA farms with greater access to consumers through Faith in Place's network of faith communities across Illinois. During the grant period, we operated 30 markets by collaborating with 22 unique host houses of worship. 55 vendors participated in at least one market, with most vendors attending multiple markets. Activities included improving promotion within the community and educational materials. Beneficiaries included the vendors, who were financially supported during the slower months by selling their products at the markets, as well as the 6,718 market attendees who had access to fresh, local foods. Additionally, Faith in Place expanded our efforts to reach people using SNAP benefits, and consumers in food scarce neighborhoods. We also collaborated with the Illinois Band of Farmers CSA Coalition to promote opportunities for individuals to sign up for CSA shares, and for houses of worship to be drop-off sites for CSA farms. Our most impressive result was a 15.9% increase in market gross sales for 2014-15 from the 2013-14 baseline.

Goals and Objectives:

To meet our goal of increasing attendance and sales for local vendors at the markets, our objectives were to increase 1) gross sales by 10% over the 2013-14 baseline of \$61441.30; 2) increase attendance at the markets by at least 10% each year from the 2013-14 baseline of 3878; and 3) increase attendance and sales from low-income consumers. To meet our goal of providing producers with greater access to consumers, our objectives were to 1) improve promotion of existing CSA drop-off sites at houses of worship, and 2) promote sales of CSA shares through our network of faith communities. The Winter Farmers Markets are needed because they provide opportunities for local vendors to sell foods that are available year-round during a time period when there are fewer farmers markets. Also, many farmers need a flexible place to sell variable amounts of seasonal produce, as well as CSA shares. Our unique model of hosting markets in different communities allows producers to access new consumers. People of faith have a strong interest in supporting local food systems and healthy communities, but don't often know how to access local farmers, especially during the winter. Prior to this grant, we had no information about how many houses of worship were drop-off sites for CSA farms.

Activities:

1. Improved market promotion by ordering new banners and sidewalk signs to display outside the market locations; designing new flyers for each market and season schedules with consistent messaging about product availability and EBT acceptance; and improving the process for sending publicity materials to host sites.
2. Expanded the reach of the markets by hosting 2 markets at faith communities with a more diverse membership in the Pullman and Chatham/West Avalon neighborhoods of Chicago.
3. Improved educational materials by updating Frequently Asked Questions and Vendor Biographies documents available at the markets, and updating the Winter Farmers Market page of our website.
4. Improved market record-keeping processes by using a clicker for attendance (previously attendance was sometimes estimated); and by creating an online survey and phone call process to collect consistent feedback from vendors and host sites.
5. Improved EBT sales by streamlining messaging about EBT acceptance across all modes of communication, including flyers and our website; applying for another grant to obtain a functional EBT machine; offering EBT Double Value incentive coupons at the market held Glenview New Church on January 31, 2015 with funds donated by the church; and improving vendors' training on EBT acceptance by providing an info sheet and verbally explaining the process to each vendor at the beginning of each season.
6. Training for market managers by attending Illinois Farmers Market Association Conferences on March 21, 2015 and February 17, 2016; Growing Food and Justice for All Conference September 25-26, 2015; and Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Conference July 14, 2016.
7. Collaborated with Band of Farmers CSA Coalition to compile baseline data of CSA drop-off sites at houses of worship and uploaded to our new website database.
8. Promoted CSA sign-ups and houses of worship becoming drop-off sites through Band of Farmers CSA Coalition tabling at 15 markets and CSA brochures available at all markets; 2 blog posts about CSAs on our website; social media posts;

Accomplishments:

1. Vendors' gross sales at the markets increased 15.9% from the 2013-14 baseline of \$61, 441.30 to \$71,188.61 in 2014-15. Disappointingly, vendors' gross sales decreased 39% from \$71,118.61 in 2014-15 to \$43,195.16 in 2015-16, which was a 29.8% decrease from the baseline of \$61, 441.30 in 2013-14.
2. Average vendor intake (gross sales/number of vendors) increased 1.9% from \$369.47 in 2013-14 to \$376.4 in 2014-15. It decreased 28.3% from 2014-15 to \$269.91 in 2015-16, which was a 26.9% decrease from the baseline in 2013-14.
3. Average attendance per market increased 6.8% from 258.53 in 2013-14 to 276.3 in 2014-15. It decreased 35.5% from 2014-15 to 178 in 2015-16, which is a 31% decrease from the 2013-14 baseline.
- 3a. We attribute these declines to multiple factors. Three houses of worship that had hosted markets for several years (with two of these houses of worship hosting two markets each in 2014-2015) were unable to host in 2015-16. The six host houses of worship that replaced them were much smaller in members and physical space than the ones they replaced, and first time markets are usually less well-attended because the wider community has not become familiar with them. Several regular vendors who participated in previous seasons were not available at all or were available for fewer markets than usual, meaning that their regular "followers" who specifically sought out their products no longer had reason to attend our markets and support other vendors. Additionally, several vendors cancelled at the last minute before markets because of family health concerns, vehicle problems, etc. With fewer vendors and less product offering at markets, customers had less to purchase, leading to lower gross sales.
4. Two markets were held in neighborhoods defined by the USDA as Low Income (LI) & Low Access (LA) areas in 2015-16, a 100% increase from the baseline of 1 in 2013-14.
5. Total EBT sales increased 20.1% from the 2013-14 baseline of \$326.63 to \$392.50 in 2014-15, and increased 42.4% from the 2013-14 baseline to \$465.05 in 2015-16. In 2014-15, our EBT machine was nonfunctional at many markets because most host sites had digital phone jacks rather than the analogue phone jack required for the machine to connect. The process of completing a paper voucher and calling in the transaction was cumbersome and undignified for the customers. Happily, we received a new EBT machine in December 2015 which made processing transactions much easier, and we had \$388 in EBT sales January through March 2016 after obtaining the new equipment.
6. We obtained baseline data that 17 houses of worship are CSA drop-off sites and we listed them in the database on our website: <https://www.faithinplace.org/our-programs/csa-drop-site>. After promoting becoming a CSA drop-off site through various communications channels, we received 1 inquiry from a house of worship, which we passed along to Band of Farmers.

Beneficiaries:

1. Number of vendors who participated in at least one market during the grant period: 55
2. Number of vendors who participated in multiple markets during the grant period: 36
3. Average number of vendors per market: 14 (2014-15); 10 (2015-16)
4. Number of houses of worship that hosted one or more markets: 22
5. Average vendor intake (gross sales/number of vendors) increased 1.9% from \$369.47 in 2013-14 to \$376.4 in 2014-15. It decreased 28.3% from 2014-15 to \$269.91 in 2015-16.
6. Two markets were held in neighborhoods defined by the USDA as Low Income (LI) & Low Access (LA) areas in 2015-16. The markets in the Pullman and Chatham/West Avalon neighborhoods of Chicago were ranked #7 and #11, respectively out of 16 markets, when looking at the average vendor intake. And even though it had the lowest attendance of all of the markets, the Chatham/West Avalon market actually had the highest amount of spending per attendee!
7. In our Vendor Survey, vendors reported that the markets “Gave us an opportunity to earn additional income during the slower winter months” (84.6% in 2014-15, 72.7% in 2015-16); “Connected us with consumers throughout the Chicago area” (92.3% in 2014-15, 72.7% in 2015-16); and “Allowed us to sell our products in communities we don't normally reach” (76.9% in 2014-15; 81.8% in 2015-16).
8. In our Host Site Survey, house of worship volunteers reported that the benefits of the markets were “Providing an additional source of income for local farmers and vendors during the off-season” (71.4% in 2014-15; 93.3% in 2015-16); “Promoting sustainable farming methods and education on the local foods movement” (85.7% in 2014-15; 93.3% in 2015-16); Bringing new individuals through our doors” (100% in 2014-15; 86.7% in 2015-16); and “Strengthening our congregation’s presence in the wider community” (100% in 2014-15; 86.7% in 2015-16).
9. No formal demographic information collected from vendors or customers.
10. Please see Appendices A and B for demographic information about neighborhoods/cities surrounding the market locations.

Lessons Learned:

1. Offering Double Value incentive coupons for EBT users at the Glenview New Church market on January 31, 2015, funded by donations from the congregation, season resulted in \$86 in EBT sales, compared to \$0 in EBT sales at the market the church hosted earlier that season on November 15, 2014, and \$0 in EBT sales at the church’s market in 2013-14. This shifted our focus to seeking funding from grants and houses of worship for EBT Double Value during the last 6 months of the grant period as we prepared for the 2016-17 markets.
2. In our grant proposal, we planned to use webinars to train vendors on accepting EBT and orient market volunteers. However, we quickly realized that farmers and vendors who were too busy to answer emails or didn’t have sufficient internet access on their farms were ill-equipped to participate in webinars. We found that providing in-person instruction to vendors on how to accept link, and one-on-one phone calls with volunteers to discuss each host house of worship’s unique volunteer needs were most effective.
3. In the 2014-15 season, we encountered the unanticipated challenge of a blizzard that resulted in cancelling the market that was scheduled to be held on February 1, 2015 at Temple Shalom in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood. This meant that there was one fewer opportunity for vendors to be able to sell their goods and for consumers to have access to local foods, and decreased the overall potential sales for the market season.
4. The drastic drop in sales in the 2015-16 season taught us that it is critical to consider the potential reach that a house of worship has in the wider community when choosing market sites. If a house of worship isn't well connected in the neighborhood or wider community, it is harder for them to adequately promote the markets and have good attendance.
5. Promoting CSA drop-off sites largely through online communications with our network of faith communities was ineffective. If we could do it over, we would make sure that all Faith in Place outreach staff, who work with faith communities across the state, were familiar with the grant goals of promoting CSA partnerships and actively recruiting drop-off sites, rather than just the staff working on Winter Farmers Markets being aware of this.
6. Due to the funding provided under FMPP: EBT sales increased 42.4% over 2 years at the Winter Farmers Markets.