

***Farmers Market Promotion Program
Final Performance Report
Grant Period October 2014 to September 2016***

Date: 12-31-2016 / 14-FMPPX-LA-0074
Recipient Name: Big River Economic & Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA)
Project Title: Healthy Food Access from Local Louisiana Farmers
Grant Number: October 2014 / 14-FMPPX-LA-0074
Project Location: Baton Rouge, LA
Year of Grant
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Program: Summary

The overall goal of the project is to develop & implement a comprehensive marketing plan that will increase the number of SNAP customers at all locations of Red Stick Farmers Market. This subsequently increases direct sales and revenue for local farmers. After two years of using different marketing tools, we found the most effective way to reach new SNAP customers was through collaborative efforts with partner sites and through the addition of 'double' match monies for SNAP customers. Baton Rouge and the surround region experienced in 2016 recovery from two major flood events. Throughout this period farmers we realized the impact of Disaster SNAP benefits and also increased cooking demonstrations and postcard mailings through collaboration with SNAP partner sites. Word of mouth about the new 'match rewards' for SNAP customers of up to \$10 in matching rewards increased the number of new SNAP customers. When a new SNAP customers signs up to receive the rewards, we ask where they heard about the program and over 85% marked 'from a friend' or 'from a community partner' as the most frequent way customers learned of the program.

Goals and Objectives:

1. Determine marketing strategies to communicate with SNAP customers the benefits of shopping at farmers markets. Surveys were sent to 10,000 residents in mobile farmers market zip codes of 70802, 70807 and 70806. Telephone surveys were conducted with a random selection of customers with 350 responding. Focus groups for SNAP Customers were conducted on 3 occasions with 20 random members responding to attend each focus group. These activities were handled through SCI consultants. 2. Increase consumption of locally grown fruits & vegetables; increase revenue/direct sales for local farmers. Through effective use of our network of community partners BREADA distributed 1,920 recipe cards to partner sites and mailed seasonal postcards with site locations & SNAP benefits accepted announcements 8 times during the grant cycle, mailing 5000 postcards each time to targeted zip codes where the mobile farmers market would be located. We had a steady increase of SNAP usage in the first year and during the 2016 experienced an increase in SNAP usage of over 50% due to the disaster SNAP benefits issued in the spring and fall flood recovery periods. Chef demonstrations always increased the purchase of locally grown fruits and vegetables. When a particular ingredient was featured, the mobile farmers market would sell out of that ingredient. Customers were surveyed on trying new ingredients through recipe cards and over 70% said they would purchase the ingredient

again. In the 2 year grant cycle BREADA sold \$25,463 in farm produce at mobile farmers market sites. 3. Provide technical assistance and resources for new, young farmers on how to sell at farmers markets. New farmers and vendors were trained twice a year on the usage of the token system. All market vendors are required to participate in the token system to be a part of Red Stick Farmers Market. We also featured "Know Your Farmer" signage for Senior Coupon and WIC Coupon customers at mobile farmers market sites and encouraged shoppers to identify with the Louisiana farmer and seasonal produce grown. Through BREADA's Louisiana Small Farm Survival Fund, we reached out with assistance to new farmers who had been affected by the flood events of 2016. We also found that connecting our new farmers with a mentor farmer was most effective in helping new farmers adapt their sales methods to a farmers market environment. Six new farmers and their mentor farmers met regularly for breakfast prior to the Saturday market to discuss issues they might be having.

Activities:

1. Determine marketing strategies to communicate with SNAP customers the benefits of shopping at farmers markets: Several options were considered at the beginning of the program following responses from surveys and focus group sessions. We concentrated our efforts with the Mobile Farmers Market locations in North Baton Rouge zip codes 70802, 70807 and in mid-city locations of 70806. We varied the time of day for market locations and concentrated on collaborating with site partners in advertisements. We found that new customers coming to markets were more effectively reached through mailing of coupons/postcards and chef demonstrations at partner sites rather than advertisements on radio. We did see an impact of increased awareness in 2016 during flood recovery when PSA's were run on television stations and the WAFB weather man mentioned that disaster snaps benefits were available at Red Stck Farmers Market. We also found that in the second year our health site partners would help increase SNAP usage by handing out recipe cards that we supplied with SNAP information and locations of the mobile farmers market on the back side. Generally at the health center sites, customers came from the medical staff rather than patients. Patients shopping as they left doctor's appointments were recorded with a voucher system. Patients were not necessarily SNAP customers and often did not become repeat customers. Patients weren't at the location on a weekly basis where medical staff would be there every week. Medical staff included SNAP customers and these were more often the ones that became repeat customers. 2. Marketing and Promotion events were held at community sites monthly over the grant period. Sites for events included the Mall of Louisiana, 10 neighborhood churches, 3 community health centers of LSU Health BR, 4 Headstart centers, 3 inner city schools, the Food Bank, the City of Baton Rouge Health Fair, and 22nd Street FNS Snap sign up location for Disaster SNAP. 3. During the grant period Chef Celeste Gill hosted weekly demonstrations with local chefs at the Saturday Market and coordinated 25 chef demonstrations for the Mobile Farmers Market sites. Recipe cards and kids activities were available at every weekly site during the seasonal mobile markets (March through July and September through December). 4. Two farmers hosted visits to their farms for SNAP repeat customers as a reward for over 12 punch cards being turned in (repeat customers of 36 times). 5. Video completed is planned to be shown in the spring season of 2017 - due to flood events in 2016, it was not completed due to damage of the videographer's business. In October 2016 the filming was completed but video is expected in early 2017.

Accomplishments:

For Farmers Markets it is a challenge to develop a relationship with SNAP customers and finding the most effective tools for making SNAP recipients aware that benefits are accepted at Farmers Markets. We are very pleased to report that in 2015 over \$12,102 in SNAP tokens were purchased by SNAP customers and after a year of applying different marketing tools, we saw an increase in 2016 to \$16,642 in SNAP tokens purchased by SNAP customers. Total of SNAP tokens issued for both years = \$32,005 with BREADA matching a total of \$17,805 for a total of \$49,810 spent with local farmers at Red Stick Farmers Markets. (Note: we also understand that D-SNAP is part of the difference since under the Disaster benefits more people were eligible). We also recruited 10 new farmers through the 2014 FMPP USDA grant and 7 of those farmers have become actively involved attending

markets regularly on a weekly basis. One of the new farmers is also part of the LSU Ag Leadership program and has been sharing her social media knowledge with other farmers! We also understand that there are challenges involved in recruiting and retaining new farmers, especially as older farmers are starting to retire. We do find that our new farmers are very enthusiastic about serving all of the community and eager to learn new marketing skills from one another. The marketing opportunities have been most helpful in reaching out to our SNAP customers and new farmers, but we also find with a small staff it is difficult to find an easy way to track results. Thank you for the opportunities afforded by this grant!

Beneficiaries:

Red Stick Mobile Farmers Market operates in North Baton Rouge zip codes 70807, 70802 and 70805 which has 95% black population, a median average household income of \$25,273 and 35% of the population is below poverty level. Beneficiaries of the grant program are the customers who use their SNAP benefits and the farmers who have increased sales. We have survey questions for SNAP customers when they sign up and when they receive a 3rd punch on their frequent shopper card. We find that the biggest obstacle to shopping for local foods is not transportation or availability, but rather the frequency of times they cook meals at home. We have worked with local chefs to create easy recipes using some local ingredients and some 'on hand' ingredients. From those who take dot surveys about recipes they've tried, we find that over 80% will try the recipe again and have added more fruits and vegetables in their diets. SNAP Customers who come to our mobile farmers market are given information about the year round sites. The sales for SNAP customers are much higher at the year round farmers markets & surveyed customers report they prefer to shop directly with the farmer at the year round market sites, and shop for convenience at the mobile farmers market sites. All of the participating farmers who have a wider variety of fruits and vegetables have reported an increase in sales. Generally due to the floods of 2016, farmers have reported a decrease in sales during the late spring and fall of 2016. Summer sales remained high. This relates directly to the number of homes that were flooded in the surrounding areas. Many families are still not back in their homes and either are staying with relatives or renting and have smaller kitchens. Flooded Residents who come to the Market generally report that they are buying less because they are not back in their homes.

Lessons Learned:

The 2014 FMPP grant enabled us to really expand our impact with SNAP benefits at Red Stick Farmers Market. We started the program in 2010 with an earlier FMPP grant and had been slowly growing the success. With the opportunities afforded by the 2014 grant we saw an increase in the number of SNAP customer. Form a starting point of 5,124 customers annually and averaging 427 SNAP customers per month we increased to 6,477 in year one of the grant with an average monthly # of 540 SNAP customers. In the second year we had 10,174 SNAP customers with a monthly average of 848. In our community we learned that it was important for the general public to understand that we gladly accepted the Louisiana Purchase Card (SNAP benefits) as it encouraged our donor base to recognize we were meeting our mission of food access availability for everyone. Yet we found for the average SNAP customer, marketing through the media and advertisements rarely brought us SNAP customers. We found it more effective to reach the SNAP customer base through post cards, events at community centers or neighborhood churches, and word of mouth rather than through typical media marketing channels. In the second year of the project, our state had two flood events that impacted both our customers and our farmers/markets in the Baton Rouge area. It certainly helped our Markets to have the positive addition of D-SNAP customers, especially for the farmers who came from areas that had not been flooded. But because the flood created problems in housing, we felt a loss in foot traffic because people were busy rebuilding homes during the times when they might be visiting markets. We have recognized that it takes time and patience to increase the number of SNAP customers. In general but especially with families who are affected by food access availability, meals are not prepared in the homes but rather purchased at fast food restaurants or by purchasing

more prepared foods from groceries and other food distribution centers. Cooking demonstrations and classes were valuable in encouraging customers to try simple, easy to prepare dishes. In the future we hope to provide 'prepared' style, cook at home meals to go using farm fresh ingredients & making them available through the Red Stick Rewards programs. We were surprised that SNAP customers preferred to shop at our year round markets and enjoyed getting to know the farmers there while attendance at the mobile farmers market sites was not as frequent or regular as we had hoped. BREADA recognizes also that the outreach program for SNAP customers requires a lot of staff time and has spread our staff duties a bit thin in other areas. Farmers have been extremely positive about the program and have often shared recipes of their own with SNAP customers. At our 2 mid-week markets we find that SNAP customers enjoy building a relationship with the farmer who grows their food. While they often also attend the mobile farmers market sites, they tell us they find it more enjoyable to shop where the farmers are on site. We also learned how critical our site partners, the mayor's office, Our Lady of the Lake & LSU HealthBR were to our success!