

Food Deserts and AMS Transportation and Marketing Programs

Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)

Council on the Environment, Inc. (now GrowNYC) – New York, NY

FY2006--\$66,000--Enabling Farmers Markets to Accept EBT [electronic benefits transfer]

FY2009--\$100,000--Providing Access to Healthy Locally Grown Food for All New Yorkers (EBT portion of 2009 grant is \$26,511)

Background: Based on prior experience implementing EBT systems at several New York City farmers markets, a centralized EBT system proved to be both expensive and ineffectual. Not only was it costly to hire someone to operate the EBT terminal and manage all accounting and reimbursements during market hours, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients were generally unwilling to swap their EBT cards in exchange for wooden tokens. Program representatives surmised that the lack of enthusiasm for the existing system might have been related to the stigma associated with using wooden tokens instead of currency, and the difficulty of estimating how much one planned to spend before actual shopping for food. It was believed that if farmers market shoppers were given the option of using their EBT cards at individual farm stands rather than at a centralized terminal, there would be less of a stigma associated with using SNAP benefits at farmers markets and patronage would increase.

Idea: As part of one of the most aggressive campaigns in the country for SNAP promotion at farmers markets, Greenmarket (the farmers market program of CENYC) experimented with direct vendor access to wireless EBT terminals, versus a single point-of-sale model, in order to more successfully tap into the estimated \$1 billion in SNAP benefits redeemed in New York City each year and encourage greater patronage of farmers markets by lower-income households.

Actions: Greenmarket, which currently manages 51 farmers markets across all five boroughs of New York City, provided 34 wireless EBT terminals, one for each food vendor at four urban farmers markets located in lower- or mixed-income neighborhoods. Greenmarket also hired an EBT Coordinator, the value of which cannot be overstated, according to CENYC. An equally aggressive, multi-lingual marketing campaign was also initiated with FMPP funds.

Impact: The project was able to work through the regulatory barriers affecting farmer/vendor participation in EBT transactions (e.g., licensing their own POS machine with personal social security numbers) while simultaneously reducing the stigma of a token system among SNAP consumers. These activities laid the groundwork for the subsequent surge in SNAP redemption at farmers markets in New York City. From three participating markets in 2005, EBT was operating at 23 Greenmarkets at the end of 2009 (FMPP's 2009 grant to CENYC added EBT to an additional six Greenmarkets), and Greenmarkets have grown to 51 locations in the five boroughs. From EBT sales of \$14,000 in 2006 to more than \$250,000 in 2009, the success of the Greenmarket EBT program is significant and the program is now expanding into bodegas and other retail outlets. This organization has continuously enjoyed substantial support from New York City government and in 2008 CENYC was able to leverage their FMPP-funded experience with EBT to engage in the city-sponsored Health Bucks program, a SNAP incentive that has contributed \$175,000 to date in double vouchers for Greenmarket purchases.

The balance of CENYC's 2009 grant is being used to revitalize the Wholesale Greenmarket, under Greenmarket management and with an increased diversity of fresh farm products, at the year-round New Fulton Fish Market in the Bronx. This market is facilitating wholesale purchases from small- to mid-size regional farmers by small grocers, institutions, restaurants, and food pantries. To date, the market has generated more than \$100,000 in sales and distributed over 500,000 pounds of produce.

Council on the Environment, Inc. (now GrowNYC) – New York, NY

FY2008--\$53,125--The New Farmer Development Project

Background: The New Farmer Development Project (NFDP) identifies, educates, and supports immigrants with agricultural experience by helping them become local farmers and establish small farms in the region. The NFDP was created in 2000 as a partnership between Greenmarket and Cornell Cooperative Extension's NYC Program. The project is based in New York City and supports new farmers within the city, New York's Hudson Valley and Catskill Regions, New Jersey and northeastern Pennsylvania. By training the next generation of regional farmers, the NFDP helps preserve local farmland and rural farm communities, strengthens farmers markets and regional food security, and expands public access to high-quality, locally grown farm products.

Idea: This project will provide immigrant farmers in the secondary phase of

their businesses with the additional support necessary for them to further develop and diversify their farm and marketing strategies. This will benefit NFDLP farmers, customers who buy their products, other farmers attending the markets, and immigrant farming projects throughout the country that will have a model for these services.

- Actions:** New products will be developed to offer advanced training on season extension, organic certification, and other production and marketing strategies. Training on financial management and value-added product development will be provided, and farmers will be assisted in working individually with a processing consultant. In addition to training, NFDLP farmers will be provided with an immigrant farming toolkit of relevant information on local agricultural conditions and resources. The goal of these activities is to provide 20 immigrant farmers with the ability to develop new products for market, including processed foods, certified organic produce, or pasture-raised meat.
- Impact:** (This project has received an extension until December 2010). To date, a cohort of 30 farmers has participated in numerous workshops ranging from value-added processing to greenhouse production, farm record-keeping, and equipment purchasing and has acquired product liability insurance. Five farmers have been supported by the project in purchasing a total of 33 acres of farmland, and \$72,500 in micro-enterprise loans have been made to 14 farmers (another \$37,700 in prior loans has been repaid).
- Leveraging:** Throughout the FMPP funding period, CENYC was able to learn from the experience of and partner with other FMPP grantees working in New York, including Cornell Cooperative Extension (FY2006 and FY2009), the Farmers Market Federation of New York (FY2009), and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (FY2008). Through partnership with the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets, CENYC has been able to leverage additional support from the Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FY2009 and FY2010) to address distribution challenges and for value-added product development. CENYC was also able to secure a \$25,000 cooperative agreement with the Agricultural Marketing Service Marketing Services Division in 2007.

Adelante Mujeres, Forest Grove, OR (Portland metro area)

FY2007--\$47,236--Sustainable Farming Education & Marketing for New Immigrant Farmers

FY2009--\$23,468--Vendor Small Business Support & Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Education

Background: Located in a rural community (population 21,400) 25 miles west of Portland, OR, with among the highest Hispanic population in the State, and an area with a 27 percent poverty rate, this project seeks to increase economic/social equity for, and the viability of, new immigrant, low-income Spanish-speaking families. Adelante Mujeres provides an intensive 22-week land-based training program (Adelante Agricultura) that runs throughout the year and includes skill-building and marketing support to new immigrant farmers, including assistance with land acquisition. By increasing knowledge of local growing conditions, training in farm/business management, and market mentoring, farmers are able to successfully grow and market produce at a guaranteed market outlet—the Forest Grove Farmers Market (managed by Adelante Mujeres) – and at three local apartment complexes.

Idea: Draw additional customers to the Forest Grove Farmers Market through the introduction of EBT/debit technology to help ensure a sufficient consumer base to support farmer sales. In addition to intensive farmer training, an outreach and marketing campaign was conceived of to reach out to potential senior and low-income visitors that represent 40 percent of the local population.

Actions: Initial marketing under Adelante Mujeres' FY2007 grant consisted of direct-mail flyers and increased outreach to area social service organizations and local schools. In the subsequent FY2009 grant print and television buys complemented inserts in food boxes distributed by social services organizations. Monthly *Shopping on a Budget* classes and cooking demonstrations were added to increase consumer awareness and educate them about how to use farmers market produce in healthy meals.

Impacts: During the FMPP funding period foot traffic at the Forest Grove Farmers Market doubled, increasing from 800-1,200 customers per week to 1,500 to 2,000 per week during the 2009 season. EBT redemption increased 422 percent in 2009, from \$1,250 to \$6,000. Twenty-nine families participated in 48 training sessions on farming, farm finances/management, and marketing in 2007, and an additional 42 vendors participated in 23 sessions in 2008. Thirteen participant families enrolled in an Individual Development Account, which allows a 3:1 savings match up to \$9,000 for investment in business and other assets. Twenty to 25 participant farmers now regularly sell within Adelante Mujeres' guaranteed markets, which represents approximately 80 percent of their sales. In 2009, the organization was also able to acquire the 12-acre La Esperanza Farm within the Forest Grove city limits, providing land access to graduates of

the Adelante Agricultura program.

Leverage: Based on collaborations initiated with FMPP funding, Adelante Mujeres was able to secure support from Pacific University and others for a SNAP incentive program (a \$5 match per customer). A subsequent grant of \$300,000 from USDA's Outreach and Education for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers program is allowing Adelante Mujeres to continue their farmer training.

Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP)

FY2006 and 2009 California Food Bank Project

In FY 2006, FSMIP awarded a \$90,000 matching grant to the California Department of Agriculture (CDFA), in partnership with the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), to develop protocols for harvesting and distributing shed-packed crops through a statewide network of food banks, creating a new market for produce growers and improving the nutritional status of low-income individuals. Results from the 2006 project were impressive. CAFB was able to:

- Increase the number of crops distributed via the Farm to Family program from 25 to 47 between 2006 and 2008.
- More than double the number of packers participating in the program between 2006 and 2008.
- Increase the amount of fresh produce distributed from 11.5 million pounds in the first eight months of 2006 to 40.5 million pounds in the first eight months of 2008.

As a result, fresh produce purchases by CAFB increased from \$700,000 in 2006 to \$1.9 million in the first eight months of 2008. In FY 2009, CDFA and CAFB received a second FSMIP matching grant of \$88,250 to focus on the challenges of adding field-packed culled specialty crops to the statewide food banks' offerings. This project will continue through August 2011.

Marketing Services Division (Wholesale Farmers and Alternative Market Development): Recent Food Desert Related Work

Regional Food Hubs

USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2) initiative is a Departmental effort to support the development of local and regional food systems as a way of enhancing local economic development, creating "green" jobs, and enhancing access to fresh food in underserved communities. As part of this initiative, a special subcommittee

was created to support the development of regional food hubs as a critical strategy in achieving these objectives. The immediate task of the subcommittee is to document the current challenges and opportunities facing existing and potential food hub sites, and to identify emerging best practices that can be used to further the development and expansion of food hubs.

As one means of achieving this task, the subcommittee (through AMS' Marketing Services Division) has established a food hub working group that includes Wallace Center's National Good Food Network (NGFN), Project for Public Spaces (PPS), and the National Association of Produce Market Managers (NAPMM). PPS was specifically brought in as a partner to assist the subcommittee identify and analyze "healthy" food hubs that are currently addressing food access issues, or have the potential to be a key mechanism for improving healthy food access in food deserts. An initial listening session was held with approximately 30 stakeholders from the wholesale market community in Philadelphia, PA, on November 3, 2010.

Handbook on SNAP Redemptions at Farmers Markets

In June 2010, AMS released "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at Farmers Markets: A How to Handbook." The Handbook, written with help from FNS and Project for Public Spaces, offers a primer for farmers market managers interested in implementing effective EBT/SNAP programs at their market sites. In addition to distributing printed versions of the Handbook through the Farmers Market Coalition, the document has been accessed more than 7,000 times via the AMS website. FNS is also developing a video to help farmers market managers learn more about the benefits of installing EBT systems at markets and accepting SNAP benefits.

Initiating SNAP Redemptions at the USDA Headquarters Farmers Market

In August 2010, the USDA Farmers Market began participating in the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (SNAP). The market does not use tokens or scrip; rather, individual Point of Sales (POS) terminals are used by market vendors to accept SNAP payments. If a market vendor currently has a POS terminal that accepts debit/credit, a SNAP payment option can be added to that terminal.

Cooperative Agreement with Detroit's Eastern Market

AMS' Marketing Services Division is partnering with Detroit's Eastern Market under a cooperative agreement entitled, "Detroit Fresh Food Network: Developing a Model Urban Healthy Food Hub." Eastern Market's management, which oversees the operation of more than 250 independent retail and wholesale merchants, aims to move larger volumes of food from its wholesale market operation into underserved "food desert" neighborhoods by developing alternative distribution methods to help local residents obtain greater access to fresh, locally grown produce. Specific tasks include: 1) expanding the number of direct marketing venues so that consumers without easy transportation access have a better opportunity to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and

vegetables, 2) improving the financial performance of direct marketing outlets through vendor training and consumer education, and 3) improving the coordination of deliveries between wholesale growers and Detroit Fresh Food Network vendor participants through logistical services. The subsequent analysis can be expected to contribute substantially to USDA's ongoing work in understanding how coordinated wholesale "food hubs" may help improve the diets of households in "food desert" neighborhoods.

Cooperative Agreement with Greenmarket in New York City

AMS' Marketing Services Division is partnering with Greenmarket under a cooperative agreement entitled, "Assessing the factors driving market success: Research and Analysis of Greenmarket Farmers Markets in New York City." Greenmarket, a program of GrowNYC, operates and manages over 40 farmers markets in New York City. The primary objective of the research collaboration is to analyze the factors driving farmers market success in low-income and mixed-income areas. In addition, AMS and Greenmarket also partnered with New York City Coalition Against Hunger to conduct a food access study to determine the availability and cost of fresh fruits and vegetables in retail food stores located around the nine farmers markets selected for this study. By analyzing a number of Greenmarket's most and least successful farmers markets in lower- and mixed-income neighborhoods, the researchers expect to identify key findings about essential building blocks of market success, including site location considerations, the breadth of vendor participation, consumer characteristics, food access, and the nature of promotional activities. An interim report has already been submitted to Greenmarket and the final report is expected to be completed by April 2011.

Connecting Local Farmers with USDA Farmers Market Nutrition Program Participants

This 2010 report summarizes the results from a pilot farmers market transportation project funded through a cooperative agreement with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Resource Conservation and Development Council. The project organized bus trips in 2006 and 2007 to farmers markets for low-income seniors and WIC recipients in southeastern Pennsylvania who receive produce vouchers redeemable at farmers markets through the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). The idea behind the project was to see if lack of transportation was keeping FMNP recipients from redeeming their checks at farmers markets. A total of 505 people participated in 29 farmers market trips organized through the project. Participation rates varied significantly between the two target groups. Seniors were recruited through community senior centers and low-income senior housing centers and participated in high numbers. Many WIC participants, on the other hand, experienced family problems and difficulties with children that kept them from accepting rides to farmers markets. Overall, the results suggest other mechanisms are needed to increase redemption rates for WIC FMNP participants.

This pilot project has inspired the creation of two related efforts in Pennsylvania to boost farmers market patronage by low-income people. One, the Chester County Health Department is organizing a farmers market at a government office building. The market is targeting county employees and WIC recipients who receive their benefits in the building. Two, a housing shelter in Berks County is opening a small farmers market for its clients and members of the surrounding community. Many shelter clients and community residents receive either Senior or WIC FMNP checks.

National Study of Local Food Distribution System Models

AMS' Marketing Services Division is nearing completion of a comprehensive study of nine alternative distribution models spread across the country, including those operated by retail cooperatives, producer cooperatives, and non-profit organizations. While the primary focus of the study is to investigate the most promising and profitable models of distribution available to smaller-scale food producers, there are two clear instances in which these alternative distribution systems directly lead to expanded fresh food access for those who may not have optimal access to healthy and affordable food:

Example 1: The Oklahoma Food Cooperative. The Cooperative is a statewide buying club that uses the internet, a central distribution hub, and a network of 48 distribution routes to connect producers and consumers across the state. There are two specific ways the cooperative enhances food access. First, it increases access to healthy, fresh foods for residents of small towns and rural areas of Oklahoma that have few or no grocery stores in the vicinity. Cooperative members are able to buy food items that otherwise would not be available to them or would require them to travel great distances. Second, home delivery is provided free of charge to home-bound cooperative members.

Example 2: Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD). ASD is a non-profit organization based in southwest Virginia that runs an organic produce distribution company selling primarily to regional grocery chains in the southeastern United States. It has a program in which it solicits donations from the public that are used to buy lower quality produce from its supplying farmers, or "seconds," that would not be sellable to grocery stores. This produce is then donated to food banks in the Abingdon, VA, area.

Design Support for South Carolina Farmers Market

AMS' Marketing Services Division recently prepared a conceptual design for the Chester County, SC, Agricultural Economic Development Center, which converts an historic building (donated by the city of Chester) into a permanent facility for a community farmers market and other ancillary businesses. The community used the design concept, which respects the city's historical architecture and connects smoothly to the City Hall and to Main Street, as the basis for engaging local engineers and contractors and beginning development of the site. Chester County has a 24 percent unemployment rate, and a farmers market is expected to provide an economic stimulus for the community. Market proponents envision the farmers market as a community hub with a positive impact on

farmers and community health. The new facility, located in the center of Chester, is expected to contain three distinct components: a community kitchen that will be used as a food manufacturing business incubator, an indoor farmers market with space to sell value-added products and local produce, and a covered open-air farmer retail pavilion. The renovated facility includes leasable floor space for related retail businesses, the rents from which are expected to offset some of the facility's operating costs.

**Design of the “Black Belt Family Farm Fruit and Vegetable Market Center,”
Selma, AL**

AMS' Marketing Services Division led the design effort for the Selma, AL, Black Belt Family Farm Fruit and Vegetable Market Center in collaboration with Tuskegee University and a local architect. The Center's goal is to boost the local economy and enhance the tax base of the City of Selma and Dallas County. The proposed facility will enable minority and underserved farmers to access profitable value-added markets for their produce on a large and sustainable scale. The center will be designed for collecting, washing, cooling, grading, packaging and marketing vegetables and fruits that are grown and harvested by cooperative farmer members, with the objective of helping local farmers: 1) produce and deliver a high-quality, uniform product, and 2) gain access to more lucrative marketing channels by marketing their products collectively.