

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Agricultural Development
Agricultural Development & Diversification Program (ADD)
Grant Project Final Report

Contract Number: 22085

Grant Project Title: Farmers' Market Pre-Buy
Amount of Funding Awarded: \$29,670
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Please use the following questions as a guide for writing your grant project final report. In your final report, please answer each question as it relates to your grant project.

1) What was the original intent of the grant?

Online sales have proven highly effective in numerous markets, and offer large potential for farmers to increase profits, reduce waste, and expand their markets. Since the start-up and maintenance costs for such websites are prohibitively expensive (anywhere from \$2,000 to over \$10,000 for development, bandwidth, upgrades, storage space and follow-up assistance), few farmers are able to take advantage of this tool.

The Farmers' Market Pre-Buy (now called Local Dirt) eliminates the cost of developing a website. It uses an ASP (application service provider) model allowing all users to share the same system.

Benefits to Wisconsin farmers are twofold: 1) farmers save the costs of developing their own online purchasing system, and 2) farmer's sales will increase with the additional sales outlet.

Agricultural local food transactions have largely been paper and pencil driven. Local Dirt applies the benefits of online technology to local food sales, at no cost to farmers or customers. This unique ASP interface has never before been applied to agriculture.

2) What steps did you take to reach your goal?

1. Designing a basic site
2. Conducting a farmer focus group
3. Designing and developing Local Dirt
4. Developing and implementing training materials for the producer focus groups
5. Develop and execute a marketing plan to gain participation by both producers and buyers
6. Take subscriptions for Local Dirt

Farmers found many more benefits from Local Dirt than expected:

- Predicting orders – meat and bakery producers were the most appreciative of this benefit. One meat producer described the problem as having limited capabilities to bring products and a high consumer demand. She said one freezer will fit in her truck and each market she needs to guess at what to pack it with. Every market consumers ask for a products left back on the farm and she loses potential sales.
- Online presence – even Amish farmers (farmers without computers) are able to have a profile page. They can simply call or send their information in and I, or the market manager can add their profile to the market. Customers who have questions about the farm can look online as, during peak hours, there is little to no time during the market to answer questions.

- No cost – since costs are minimal, I have decided not to charge for farmers or customers for Local Dirt. I will be looking for a nonprofit to take over the marketing and training. Donations or advertising will be used to cover all technical costs.

3) What were you able to accomplish?

As a result of the DATCP grant, GreenLeaf Market has completed development of Local Dirt, the farmers' market pre-order site. This is the first of its kind in the nation, allowing all farmers' markets to create a web page, all of its vendors to create a web page as part of the market, and for each vendor to upload products for pre-order. All of this can be accomplished without any financial outlay on the part of the markets, vendors, or their customers. No development is needed to customize the software to fit the markets' needs, as is the case for all other online solutions at this time.

To date, over 60 vendors have expressed interest, asking for additional assistance in getting started with signing up. Five of these vendors do not have internet access; two do not have computers, but still would like a profile page as part of the Dane County Farmers' Market.

Several vendors have taken the initiative to sign up and upload products without need of assistance. Although these vendors assert that assistance is not needed, other vendors are asking for assistance on the premise of inexperience with the internet.

4) What conclusions can you make based on project work the analysis of collected data?

As the first farmers' market season is just beginning, data will be more complete in November. Currently interest is exceptionally high from both vendors and customers.

The goal to create a user-friendly interface has been accomplished but vendors do not have the computer experience to feel comfortable enough to sign up without assistance. The number of requests for assistance is so high, an intern is needed to support the first season of implementation.

5) What do you plan to do in the future as a result of this project?

This summer will be focused on contacting markets, giving signup assistance, and training their vendors.

Local Dirt is in the process of partnering with an agricultural nonprofit with the goal to keep the site free of charge to users. This will ensure a greater number of users, and spur further growth of the local food market.

The Farmers Market Promotion Program grant has been applied for to procure additional support for the vendors.

6) What information or additional resources are needed to commercially develop this enterprise?

Currently the number of requests for assistance outstrips resources. A seasonal intern is needed to accommodate the training needs of the vendors for the first two seasons.

7) How should the agricultural industry use the results from your grant project?

Local Dirt is available for any farmers' market and vendor to use immediately, free of charge, to market, inform, and increase their direct marketing sales.