



EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT LOCAL AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS' MARKETS

Friends of the Farmers' Markets – Santa Fe

New Mexico has a fascinating state model Friends of the Farmers' Markets (FFM) program, directed by Pamela Roy in Santa Fe. Its purposes are to solicit broader recognition of the state's farmers' markets, foster increased support among consumers and institutions for sustainably grown agricultural products, enhance marketing opportunities for the farmers, and encourage family farming and the preservation of indigenous agricultural traditions.

Friends of the Farmers' Markets seeks to achieve these goals through on-farm research, workshops and conferences, and "Farm Connection." This bimonthly newsletter uses both contributed articles and farmer-to-farmer dialogue to cover national and regional policy issues, direct farm marketing and local sustainable topics.

FFM also provides conference scholarships for farmers, sponsors farm improvement clubs to give seed money for farmer group projects, and funds farmers' market projects like customer surveys and farmer education workshops.

Roy says, "Farmers need to think about their farmers' market venture as a business. Especially as markets grow and there's more a competitive environment, farmers need to learn business skills like writing a business plan and utilizing long-range cash-flow planning instead of operating out-of-pocket from day to day." Teachers from local Small Business Development Centers or other nonprofit organizations are perfect for Friends workshops.

FFM also educates the community, especially children, through programs such as: a Farm Tour throughout northern New Mexico; hands-on activities in the Farmers' Market Garden; Shop with the Chefs and food demonstrations; festivals such as Stone Soup and Corn Grinding & Tortilla-Making Day; as well as Taste, Touch and Smell days.

Kids' Education. The "Farm to School" fall program reaches 2000 students at 20 Santa Fe public grade schools, fairly extensive outreach in a town of 60,000. "The kids come to the farmers' market and participate in our programs; the teachers' love it," Roy says. "It makes such a great field trip, and one of the things that we are aiming at in our grant proposals is to institutionalize the farmers' market in the school system through our Farm to School Program."

The FFM helps teachers enrich their curriculum on food topics by offering presentations in the schools prior to the market tours. Farmers are provided stipends to give the presentations and host field trips on their farms. The program thus offers introductory presentations about the farmers' market, visits to the market and on-site education, farmer visits to the classroom and farm field trips.

The "Kids in the Garden" program involves hands-on activities in a small community garden, about 70-yards long by 8-feet wide, at the farmers' market. "Kids of all ages" are invited to: "Come dig the soil, plant seeds, identify common garden plants, construct trellises, harvest the bounty and taste the fresh tomatoes."

"We use the garden as an alive, hands-on experience," Roy says. On Seed Planting Day, kids plant in the garden. When they come back to the farmers' market week after week, they can actually see and tend their plants. They also take home six-packs of planted seeds to cultivate at home.

Compost Critters Day allows kids to use microscopes and eyeglasses to inspect all the beneficial insects in the garden. They also prepare soil and make compost.

Farm Tours. In 1999 there were 600 people from New Mexico and out-of-state who visited 20 participating farms. "The farm tour is a great opportunity for experiential learning," Roy says. "People learn how the food is grown and how to connect with their local farmer." They saw wool spinning, compost making, and bread making by a local bakery. The bakery handed out their brochures about encouraging the revitalization of local wheat production in New

Mexico. The demonstrations were all done at farms; similar exhibitions are done at farmers' markets.

Taste Festivals. "Fresh tastings enable you to expand your palate by sampling the many varieties of super-fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs available at the market," Roy says. "You get to know those small, sweet, yellow tomatoes perfect for salads, kids or salsa; which roasted chili variety has just the right amount of heat for you; and whose sweet apricots and peaches you will stuff yourself on this summer!"

Taste, Touch and Smell days are seasonal events to celebrate locally grown, regional specialties. There are at least 40 varieties of tomatoes at the market, so a tomato tasting is a natural. Similarly, at the Chile Festival market visitors can sample 20 to 30 varieties of chili and sweet peppers, roasted and raw. With the Apple Tasting they can sample a dozen or more varieties and pick up literature that describes which apples are tart and sweet, which are good for apple pie, and which make a better applesauce. Sometimes farmers are paid for their produce or flour from grant funds while others make contributions.

Stone Soup Day revolves around a sweet children's fable. A pauper arrived in a community and went door-to-door asking for food. Unsuccessful, he decided to ask people for help in making a community stone soup. He asked each household if they could contribute some carrots or some tomatoes and each one was willing. The soup project snowballed. Just by saying "I have a stone" and "I'm contributing," he got the community to contribute to a pot of soup. At the market the fable is told and kids learn to make soup, starting with a vegetable broth base. Adults love it, too.

On the same day they teach corn grinding and tortilla making. Market corn growers contribute cobs of corn. Kids shuck and grind it and make tortillas, a great source of pride, from the cob right to the tortilla.

"We want people to be conscious about where they buy their food and why, and we want people to know that they have options," Roy says, explaining FFM's considerable efforts in educating the public



Vance Corum

A farmer becomes one with her dried flower arrangements which will make perfect gifts or home accents, paying for those long hours of design work by the fireplace. Some growers offer classes on arranging to spur flower sales.

about local agriculture. "This is important because the young people growing up now are at least one if not two generations removed from family farms. They no longer have a grandparent or an uncle or aunt who operate a farm. So a lot of these kids, along with many adults, really don't know much about farm life and they have no idea where their food comes from.

"We recognize that convenience is one of the number-one things people are looking for now in the 21st century — consumers lead very busy, active lives, so we're recognizing that farmers' markets need to make some transition to a certain extent.

"Yet we feel we're also here to help people make decisions about their food, learn where their food comes from, how it can be prepared, how they can be involved in their local food system if they want to be, and that they can make a conscious choice. That supermarket tomato may not be the only tomato in town — the local grocer or farmers' market may provide a tomato that is grown locally in the community, and by buying that instead of the supermarket variety, they're supporting the local economy.

"That's why we feel the educational aspect of the farmers' markets is so important. I always expect that people look for the higher good, but I'm also realistic in recognizing that our world provides us with so much information overload that sometimes people

have to make the simplest choices for themselves. If we can touch even ten percent of the community, we feel we are making an impact.”

Shop with the Chef. This program especially highlights local, indigenous foods such as chili, squash, corn posole and frijoles (beans) and also focuses on seasonal varieties of fruits and vegetables. “There’s a lot of local indigenous foods around here that customers might see at the market, but they don’t know how to use,” Roy says. “These are culturally traditional or ethnic foods that customers ordinarily wouldn’t see in other parts of the country.”

“The chef will talk about the goat cheese or rhubarb that she’s using in a demonstration, and why it’s important to buy seasonally — why you don’t see oranges or bananas in the farmers’ market in Santa Fe, for example, and why you’ll find greens and peas early in the year in the market and not apples,” says Roy.

Ferry Plaza — San Francisco

Sibella Kraus, who founded the Tasting of Summer Produce in the early 1980s, created a non-profit Center for Urban Education About Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA) to run the market, a favorite site for premier organic growers and specialty food producers. Now Frankie Whitman acts as the consultant, developing innovative, educational programs at the market.

Ferry Plaza does a “Shop with the Chef Program” in which a local chef is given a budget to shop the market for what’s fresh that day. Then the chef does a demonstration about what they’ve bought and why, what the people can do with it, and recipes and samples are handed out. “We don’t have any problem getting chefs to come to the market,” Whitman says, “because it’s a rather high-end market and many of the chef’s restaurant customers are also shoppers at the market.”

Meet the Producer. A recent tie-in to the chef program is a weekly half-hour presentation in which a producer or a panel speaks about why they grow certain varieties and what it takes to get their product to

market. While incredibly informative with a loyal following, attendance is less than a third that of the chef program. “People want to be entertained by celebrity chefs and learn how to cook,” Whitman says.

Ferry Plaza, too, has added its own wrinkle to the idea of festivals centered around what’s in season. “Tasting festivals are a great way to move products that are in glut,” Whitman says, “but we feel it behooves the market to come up with something a little more creative than just comparing one grower’s products against another’s. Some growers don’t like comparative tastings because they feel it pits one grower against another. We feel that the Meet the Producer program accomplishes a little bit more than just having a product out on the table. It helps consumers understand why farmers’ market products are different than supermarket products.

To close their season, the market held “a discussion around the production of olive oil, different harvesting schedules, and a tasting of the different olive oil products.” Peggy Knickerbocker, author of a book on California olive oils, facilitated the panel discussion. “Selling books is a good trade-off for authors and it gives the people at the market something nice to bring home.” Check with a local bookstore, library or publisher to find local food authors.

“There are incredible resource people in any community who are willing to participate in these kinds of events and you need to draw on these kinds of resources,” Whitman emphasizes. If not professionally organized, these events reflect badly on presenters and the market. Have a working loudspeaker, chairs, cooking equipment and a chef’s assistant who can run it on time, introduce the program, thank people afterwards and distribute samples.

“With panel discussions make sure the panel knows in advance the questions so they can be prepared. In the Meet the Producer programs, we ask the presenters to bring in things to make it attractive, such as photographs of their farms, and set up some kind of display on the table. The programs shouldn’t go on too long, about a half-hour or 45 minutes maximum.

“Look for nonprofit groups who are doing educational work around such issues as food, nutrition or gardening. It’s an opportunity for them to get exposure.”

With weekly events, it’s hard to do extra publicity outside market signs, but with other special events, extra efforts are called for.

Cooking with Kids

Cooking with Kids is a multicultural food education program in New Mexico, currently operating in the Santa Fe and Cimarron public elementary schools. The program seeks to improve child nutrition through hands-on preparation of foods from many cultures in the classroom. Trained food educators work with students to prepare foods that are healthy and appealing. According to CWK program coordinator Lynn Walters, “If you’re trying to convince kids to eat flavorful, healthy foods, ask them to prepare it themselves. The experience of eating and enjoying good foods, rather than just hearing the message of what’s good for us, is really important. Cooking is a fun and creative process. And when children eat well, they are prepared to learn. And as they become educated about different foods, they are more likely to make positive food choices.”

In addition to helping children learn healthy food habits, CWK classes provide opportunities for children to learn math, social studies, language arts, agriculture, art and music. By studying and experiencing food from around the world, the children also learn about people of other cultures.

During the 2000-2001 school year, CWK is working in seven Santa Fe elementary schools and one school in Cimarron, providing over 1,000 food education classes to students from kindergarten through sixth grade.

Cooking Classes are taught by a CWK food educator with teacher and volunteer help. Each class lasts about 1 3/4 hours. The food educator provides a cultural context for each class, hands-on cooking instruction, age appropriate curriculum activities, discussion questions, and all materials, ingredients and supplies necessary for each meal.

One student commented on the recipe for Green & White Fettuccine with Tomato Basil Sauce: “It’s great; it’s not coming out of a package.” After cooking and eating Greek Pastitsio with Mediterranean Salad, another child said, “There is joy in my mouth now.” The same meals are prepared and served by the cafeteria staff several times a month as lunch choices in the school cafeterias.



The Integrated Nutrition Project

The Integrated Nutrition Project (INP) is a 5-A-Day program that is currently reaching 750 Hispanic children in elementary schools in Denver, Colorado. According to Cathy Romaniello, an instructor with the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, INP consists of 26 weekly nutrition lessons focused on fruits and vegetables and how they fit into the Food Guide pyramid. The lessons are linked to school district aca-

demical standards and are integrated into literacy, science, and math. They are designed to be hands-on and include food preparation and eating fruits and/or vegetables at each lesson.

Evaluation of this program from prior years found that the INP achieved significant behavior changes in children. Compared to control schools, INP children consumed 0.4 servings more fruits/

vegetables at school lunch than did control children at the year-end post test. INP children significantly improved knowledge and improved attitudes toward the school lunch program.

— For information, contact Cathy Romaniello, Instructor, Dept. of Pediatrics, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver, CO, 80262. 303-315-5401 or cathy.romaniello@uchsc.edu. ✨

Tasting classes, taught by classroom teachers, alternate with cooking classes and are devoted to having kids explore the diverse varieties of particular foods such as tomatoes or apples.

“Forty-five percent of the children in the Santa Fe Public Schools receive free or reduced-price meals,” Walters continues. “Studies show that school lunch is the only complete meal many children eat each day. Many children are no longer learning from their parents and grandparents how to make tamales or strudel. One student even thought that food originated in the refrigerator.”

To further the students’ food education CWK developed a Farmer in the Schools program, which is now coordinated by Friends of the Farmers’ Markets. The program brings local farmers into the classroom to talk about what they do and how they do it. Some farmers bring slides to show during the 30- to 40-minute presentations as well as the fruits of their labor to share with the kids.

“The parents of children who are in the CWK program frequently talk about how enthusiastic their children are after cooking in the classroom and that they like to cook more at home. We’re encouraged about the possibility of getting children excited about cooking. If they don’t cook, they’re definitely not going to know what to do with all of the beautiful produce at the farmers’ market!”

An Integrated Curriculum Guide is being developed by CWK and may be ready by fall 2001. Write to Lynn Walters at Cooking with Kids, 3508 Camino Jalisco, Santa Fe, NM 87505.



Senior Nutrition Program

In Decorah, Iowa, the Farmers’ Market Senior Nutrition Program provides senior citizens with coupons that can be redeemed at their local market for fresh produce. According to director Connie Burns, it is similar to the WIC Farmers’ Market Program and is funded through a local United Way. “The farmers love it, as do the seniors!”

Burns coordinates the program as a dietitian at a local hospital which gives “in kind” support through

secretarial time, supplies, and printing of pamphlets. Public health nurses are also involved in the distribution of coupons to their senior clients.

“There is a significant percentage of senior citizens in Winneshiek County that have limited incomes,” Burns says, “and the opportunity to include fresh produce in their nutrition plan may not have occurred without the program’s encouragement. The social and physical interactions with producers and consumers, who are advocates of healthy eating, further promotes these healthy habits. The interaction and instruction provided by the clinical dietitian, both at the meal site and the farmers’ market, also reinforces the value of having a greater intake of fruits and vegetables as part of the senior participant’s diet.”

The Decorah Farmers’ Market has 21 vendors who served an average of 280 senior citizens in 1998. Besides providing seniors with a healthy diet of fresh fruits and vegetables, the program provides seniors an opportunity to socialize, get fresh air and exercise by walking the market.

The clinical dietitian from the hospital provides nutrition presentations at the Decorah meal sites to promote the inclusion of fresh produce in the senior citizens’ diet plan and distributes coupons to encourage seniors to register for participation in the program. They are exchanged for fresh produce from farmers who provide product information including recipes, food preparation and storage ideas. The dietitian also is available at the market to monitor the program activities and to provide further education.

A participant survey indicated that 92% of the seniors increased their intake of fruits and vegetables as a result of the program, 72% used all of their coupons during the season, and 67% visited the farmers’ market six or more times in the season.

“The acceptance of the program and its utilization by the senior citizens in Decorah has been excellent,” Burns says. “The program has become popular even though we can only allocate two to four one-dollar coupons at a time to each participant. The education provided by the clinical dietitian at the meal site is a key to the success of the program in having

the produce available from farmers in a local community.”

According to Burns, “Any farmers’ market could probably set up a similar program. In fact, I’ve been trying to get a ‘how to’ manual together. I’ve done this program for seven seasons so far and have worked out the major bugs.” Contact info: Connie Burns, 903 Walnut Street, Decorah, IA, 52101, 319-382-0173.

[For other senior nutrition resources, see Resources, Chapter 12]

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