



MICHIGAN FARMERS MARKET ASSOCIATION

MIFMA Receives USDA Grant for EBT Work at Farmers Markets

Even more Michigan residents will have access to fresh, local food at farmers markets, thanks to the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) who just received a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant to continue its work with accepting Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) at farmers markets.

The USDA recently announced 85 grants totaling more than \$3.4 million directed by the new farm bill to spread the use of farmers markets, and 18 of the 85 grants promote EBT to help low-income consumers buy locally-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. Michigan Food & Farming Systems (MIFFS), the host organization for MIFMA operations, received \$44,725 to improve low-income consumers' access to and utilization of farmers markets and to expand the customer base and enhance sales volume of Michigan farmers who sell at markets.

"Our vision is to place farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food," said Dru Montri, MIFMA Project Manager. "This grant will help us get more fresh fruits and vegetables to the residents and families who need it most by helping more farmers markets and local vendors accept food stamps and offer EBT at their markets."

This project, which will run from October 2008 to December 2009, will address the critical issue of market access for low-income households, children and seniors through a statewide working group partnership and will develop consumer education strategies for nutrition, food preparation and new products at the Michigan farmers markets who currently accept food stamps.

In 2006, only three of Michigan's 150 farmers markets were authorized

and equipped to accept Bridge Cards, but through MIFMA's work in 2007, 11 markets got on board with EBT. This summer, 18 of Michigan's 185 farmers markets were accepting Bridge Cards, and with this project, that number will only go up.

Because of this work and dedication to Michigan farmers, markets and families, MIFMA and its partnering organizations were awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the USDA in February 2008 to recognize these efforts to increase the number of farmers markets serving Michigan Bridge Card clients.

"Today, more than \$1.3 billion in federal food assistance benefits are spent annually," said Montri.

This growth represents both a need and an opportunity, she said. Michigan farmers markets need to increase their accessibility to low-income individuals through the acceptance of alternative purchasing methods. This increased access is also an opportunity to enhance sales volume for Michigan farmers while providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income households.

For more information about MIFFS or MIFMA, visit www.miffs.org or www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu.



What's Happening?

- **November 13, 2008**

MSU Product Center's "Making It In Michigan Conference", www.makingitinmichigan.msu.edu

- **December 9-11, 2008**

Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo, www.glexpo.com

- **December 15, 2008**

MIFMA Board Meeting

- **January 17, 2009**

Michigan Family Farms Conference, www.miffs.org/mffc

- **January 31, 2009**

Northern Michigan Small Farm Conference, www.msue.msu.edu/antrim

- **March 6-14, 2009**

MSU Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Week

- **March 9, 2009**

MIFMA Annual Meeting and Celebration Dinner

For more information regarding these listings, call 517-432-3381.



The Michigan Farmers Market Association advances farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products. Our vision is to place farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

MIFMA Member of the Month: Allen Street Farmers Market, East Lansing

An Interview with Market Manager, Hollie Hamel



Why is the Allen Street Farmers Market, organized by the Allen Neighborhood Center (ANC), a good fit for ANC, and how does it complement your overall mission?

The ANC is a nine-year-old 501(c)(3) providing capacity-building programs and resources to the Eastside of Lansing. Our programs encompass support services including housing, health, food and building community. As ANC is grass roots driven, we routinely have conversations with and solicit feedback from our Eastside neighbors to help shape our direction.

We became aware of our neighborhood's significantly high food insecurity status in 2003 which motivated us to design a comprehensive food project that included the Allen Street Farmers Market (ASFM), the Hunter Park Garden House, and a multi-use space (Food Resource Center) complete with a commercial kitchen to be used by all. We began the market in the summer of 2004 and have never looked back! Now ending its fifth season, the ASFM has become a declared asset of the Eastside by the people of the Eastside.

You host a variety of festivals throughout the season – strawberry, tomato, apple and harvest. What is your favorite ASFM festival and why?

Many people tell us the opening of the market every May signifies that spring is "finally here." The Harvest Festival is my favorite simply because I love being bundled up and never mind the cooler temperatures. By the end of the season, the market has developed its rhythm, newer vendors have blended in with the old, many patrons have established themselves as "regulars" and the first-time visitors continue to be welcomed, greeted, thanked and invited back. Our amazing volunteers have developed a camaraderie shaped by spring rains, tornado warnings, scorching asphalt, tents, tables, signs, etc. for 24 weeks, and all of those perfect times when everything is well and there's no other place we'd rather be.

The ASFM has a huge volunteer base. How do you get so many people to commit to helping your market thrive?

We accomplish the goals of this project ONLY

with the assistance of so many dedicated volunteers. It has helped us from the beginning to develop our vision and a clearly defined operational plan. We orientate our volunteer group prior to every season and clearly map out times and tasks to accommodate most people's schedule and interests. All patrons are greeted and thanked at every entrance, and volunteers count every visitor (invaluable data). We continue to be contagiously passionate about this market and now have a volunteer coordinator present during the entire market, pulling everyone and everything together – a huge asset to operations! Our volunteers understand the mission and purpose of our being here and are an integral part of the whole. This year's markets have averaged 16 volunteers contributing 51 hours.

Can you tell the farmers market community more about your yard sign promotional efforts?

One of the ways to volunteer for the ASFM is to join our infamous Yard Sign Corps. We have invested in 500 yard signs through the years (weatherproof and similar to campaign signs) with the market name, address and hours printed on both sides. People commit to taking one home and planting it out in their front yards the evening prior to the market and then taking it down after. We maintain a record of all locations and can strategically recruit underrepresented areas. It's a win-win as an important means to volunteer and a quaint yet effective marketing campaign.

The ASFM has been a charter member of MIFMA since July 2007. Why is it important to you to be a member of MIFMA?

We were thrilled to learn that a Michigan association was being formed. The increasing food buzz throughout Michigan and beyond was impossible to ignore (such a great noise!), yet nothing existed to connect our increasing number of markets. MIFMA provides a forum for many. I am impressed with the increasing resources available on the Web site for both new markets and long-established. I believe that MIFMA offers us the opportunity to learn from each other and also provides a means to collectively shape important issues and concerns.

Welcome New Members!

MIFMA would like to welcome its new members for the months of September and October 2008.

Farmers Market members

- East Lansing Farmers Market
- Beaumont Hospital Farmers Market in Royal Oak, MI

Farmer/Vendor members

- George Zumbro of G & M Produce in Macomb, MI
- Kimi Danford of Green Barn Llama Farm in Dimondale, MI

To join MIFMA, visit www.farmersmarkets.msu.edu

