



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

Deadline for Nominations: March 3, 2015

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety**
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Catawba County Public Health Farmers Market

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Catawba County, North Carolina

Jurisdiction population(s): 154,810

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: September Year: 2014

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Mary Furtado

Title: Assistant County Manager Jurisdiction: Catawba County, NC

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Mary Furtado

Title: Assistant County Manager Jurisdiction: Catawba County

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Catawba County Public Health Farmers Market

The Problem: Catawba County, NC, has six USDA-recognized food deserts (low-income areas where grocery stores are more than a mile away from where residents live, and where transportation is a barrier). Obesity is also a health priority in the county, where 38.1% of children ages 2-18 and 72% of adults are overweight or obese. Establishing farmers markets is a proven public health strategy to increase access to healthy foods.

By early 2013, the county was home to four farmers markets but only two were certified to accept farmers market vouchers from Catawba County Public Health's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. This federal nutrition program, administered to more than 4,000 low-income Catawba County women and children monthly through Catawba County Public Health's on-site WIC clinic, offers a limited quantity of Farmers Market Nutritional Program (FMNP) vouchers to WIC clients. These vouchers enable the purchase of produce at farmers markets certified to accept them.

In 2012, the redemption rate for FMNP vouchers was 51.29% in Catawba County and 47.43% in North Carolina. Considering the lower-income population served by Catawba County's WIC program and the potentially inconvenient locations of local farmers markets, Public Health believed lack of access to the county's WIC-certified farmers markets might be a barrier to FMNP utilization. A farmers market right outside its doors, which also happened to be located in a food desert, was an ideal solution.

The Program: Catawba County Public Health established a new community farmers market – the Catawba County Public Health Farmers Market, open Thursdays from 11

a.m. to 2 p.m. – in its parking lot from May-October 2013 and again from June-September 2014.

The goals of the market were as follows:

- Increase redemption of WIC Farmers Market Nutritional Program (FMNP) vouchers
- Increase convenient access to fresh produce for area residents
- Improve individual and community health by enabling increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables

Public Health believed the market's location along a well-traveled corridor would naturally help increase access and consumption. To ensure the market could also accept WIC vouchers, Public Health gained approval to operate as a WIC-certified market and required all farmers who sold there to be certified to accept WIC vouchers as a form of payment. Public Health worked only with farmers who primarily sold fresh produce; this ensured the market also stayed true to its community health mission.

Public Health scheduled the market on a day and time that would not compete with other markets; this would help enhance access for all residents and selling opportunities for farmers. Public Health also decided not to charge farmers a booth fee in order to encourage their participation and maximize their income.

The market was created and managed by a team of employees from Public Health's Health Promotion, Administration, and WIC departments. Two staff members brought experience from starting another farmers market in the county in 2012 in conjunction with Public Health's obesity prevention coalition. To date more than 60 employees have been involved in market operations, including on-site management, vendor relations, marketing, accounting, and set up/tear down.

To help increase utilization of FMNP vouchers, WIC staff actively solicited the names of clients interested in receiving vouchers and proactively scheduled pick-up appointments when vouchers were available. This helped ensure vouchers would be distributed to more clients who would actually use them. As an incentive, a Bonus Bucks program was created to provide an additional \$4 coupon that could only be spent on produce at the market in conjunction with a WIC FMNP voucher.

In 2014, the market added SNAP/EBT food assistance and debit card access to help increase access to locally grown produce among lower-income residents (including many WIC clients), becoming the first and only market in the county to offer this service.

First-year market promotion included flyers, billboards, road signs, banners, flutter flags, bus ads, a coloring contest in local schools, a ribbon cutting, publicity, WIC client taste testings and market tours, and a weekly e-newsletter. Flyers, road signs, banners, flags, publicity and the e-newsletter were used again in 2014.

Start-up costs for the Public Health Farmers Market were covered by a state community health grant and totaled \$19,999.29, which was broken down in the following ways: capital costs/equipment (\$2,479.20); operating costs (\$9,073.17); and promotional costs (\$8,446.92). Annual recurring costs (\$1,500) replenish supplies and promotional materials. Based on staff experience, a successful market can be started on fewer funds; start-up costs for a rural farmers market in the county, which was established by Public Health staff in 2012, totaled approximately \$5,000. The 2014 addition of SNAP/EBT cost \$2,500 for equipment, supplies and promotional materials. A USDA grant covered \$1,700 (for the wireless terminal and first-year service fees). Moving forward, annual fees are anticipated at less than \$500.

Outcomes: Over the past two years (May-October 2013 and June-September 2014), Public Health hosted 41 markets serving 8,924 customers and 16 farmers. Even though fewer markets took place in 2014 (17 compared to 24), customers increased by 5.7% (from 4,338 to 4,586). The 2013 WIC FMNP redemption rate, which counts vouchers redeemed at all three WIC-certified markets in the county (including the Public Health Farmers Market), increased to 62.88% – the third highest rate in North Carolina. While 2014 redemption rates are not yet available, the Public Health Farmers Market alone redeemed 56.92%, which is higher than what it redeemed in 2013 (48.03%) and also higher than the county’s overall redemption rate in 2012 (51.2%), when only two WIC-certified markets existed. The Bonus Bucks program enabled 498 WIC clients to spend an additional \$1,992 on fresh produce across both years, and Bonus Bucks utilization increased by 12.8% from 2013 to 2014. SNAP/EBT access resulted in \$1,868 in food assistance benefits being spent at the market on fresh produce in 2014.

Market surveys indicate the following results:

- Customers said the market helped them increase the amount of fruits and vegetables their family ate both years (88.4% in 2013 and 93.2% in 2014); this number was even higher for WIC customers (95% in 2013 and 94.6% in 2014).
- WIC customers said the market made it easier to redeem their WIC FMNP vouchers (65.79%), provided the food choices they wanted (31.58%), saved time (28.95%), and reduced distance traveled (18.42%).
- 84.4% of SNAP/EBT customers said the market helped increase their family’s consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, and 73% attributed that to their ability to use their food assistance benefits at the market.

- Farmer income from market enhancements – WIC FMNP vouchers and Bonus Bucks (not counting cash sales) – in 2013 was \$5,824; with the addition of SNAP/EBT and debit in 2014, that amount nearly doubled to \$10,707.
- The market will return in 2015.

Lessons Learned: Three interesting lessons were learned through the market process:

- You don't have to do it alone. A critical partner was another local farmers market manager; she shared her knowledge about market operations and also promoted the market to her vendors, many of whom also sold at Public Health. Motivated by a desire to promote local foods and increase opportunities for local farmers, her generosity helped Public Health establish key market components.
- Starting a market doesn't have to cost a lot of money, but its success requires a significant commitment of time and staff that must be supported at every level of the organization. And involving as many staff members as possible helps build not only that support, but also morale, teamwork, and a sense of pride in being part of a successful and well-received community health initiative.
- A market will benefit you, too. While it wasn't a goal, the market helped Public Health engage with residents who may have had no other reason to come to the health department and publicly reinforce its commitment to promoting and protecting the health of the community.