

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Extension educates vendors and customers at Lewiston's Farmers' Market

The Situation

According to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, the number of farmers markets in Idaho has doubled in the last three years. Farmers' markets have potential for both economic and social benefits in the communities they serve. They stimulate the local economy by directly supporting local agricultural producers and reinvesting money back into the community. They educate consumers about where their food comes from and provide fresh, local, high quality, seasonal produce to area families.

Farmers' markets often provide a pleasant atmosphere for social interactions with live music, outdoor seating, and ready-to-eat products. They contribute to a sense of community by providing a shared place for social activity and supporting the entrepreneurship of local producers, artisans, and musicians.

The Lewiston Farmers' Market recently relocated onto a downtown parking lot. The new location can play a strategic role in the revitalization of the market because of its greater visibility to the general public. The market's location can contribute to the economic strength of the entire downtown area as well by attracting customers into downtown businesses. However, small newly emerging markets like Lewiston's often struggle because they do not have enough vendors to attract customers and therefore lack the customer base to attract additional vendors.

Our Response

During the spring of 2009, faculty and staff from the UI/Nez Perce County Extension Office began participating in the continuing development and operation of the Lewiston Farmers' Market. The office provided guidance as part of an advisory committee, maintained an education booth from June through



The Lewiston Farmer's Market moves onto Main Street to participate in the community's Alive After Five event.

September on-site at the market, collected evaluation data from market customers, and organized a ribbon-cutting ceremony to officially present the market to the community at its new location.

Extension co-hosted an informational meeting with vendors to promote a safe and successful market. Representatives from the North Central Idaho Health District and the Idaho Tax Commission were available to provide information and answer questions. Vendors received market policies and procedures on unloading, set-up and take-down of booths, operation guidelines, labeling information on food items, and a Hold Harmless Agreement with the City of Lewiston.

Extension provided education on growing, preserving, and preparing food safely. Market customers were able to taste recipe samples for locally harvested fruits and vegetables, watch demonstrations on pre-

serving jams and jellies, make healthy snacks for preschoolers, and test garden soil for nutrients.

In response to public concern about the H1N1 flu virus, Extension emphasized the importance of hand hygiene with the Germ City hand-washing activity and the distribution of 250 "Good Clean Fun" coloring books to families with young children. The coloring books teach young children how to wash their hands and to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth, the T-ZONE, where most infections enter the body.

To promote communication within the market, Extension developed a Buy Local drawing and distributed market treasure hunts to encourage customers to visit multiple produce and artisan booths. A newsletter was developed to share monthly market news with vendors and a sandwich board was designed to advertise market events to customers.

Program Outcomes

Vendor participation increased 32% from the previous year. Market inquiries increased as well with an average of 10 calls and five applications handed out weekly. Extension established a strong presence at the market with faculty and staff available to the approximately 350 people attending markets and the 600 people attending Alive After Five events once a month.

Approximately 300 customers participated in a rapid market assessment to provide a snapshot look at the market's impact. Comments from customers reflect an engaged attitude about the future of their market:

- "More shade would be nice, we love coming when we remember!"
- "Great opportunity to buy fresh produce!!"
- "Live music and more booths"
- "Someone doing barbeque"
- "Advertise special fruits and vegetables of the week"

Extension facilitated a retreat for the market advisory committee to discuss the season's successes and areas for improvement. Future goals include making the market accessible to limited resource audiences by implementing Idaho's Senior Nutrition program, providing electronic benefit transfers (EBT) for federal nutrition programs, and accepting Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) vouchers on site.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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