SUMMARY

NW MN Farmers Markets Gathering

Recap of 2012 market year, and planning session for promotions in 2013.
By Linda Kingery, Executive Director, NW RSDP.

RIVERS & PRAIRIE FARMERS MARKETS

- Bemidji Area farmers Market ~ Bemidji
- Crookston Farmers Market ~ Crookston
- Bemidji’s Natural Choice Farmers Market ~ Bemidji
- White Earth Community Farmers Market ~ White Earth & Mahnomen
- Whistle Stop Park Farmers Market ~ Dilworth
- Bagley Farmers Market ~ Bagley
- Fosston Farmers Market ~ Fosston
- Laughing Earth Farmers Market ~ Ada
- Fresh Start Farmers Market ~ Baudette
- Gonvick Farmers Market ~ Gonvick
- Mentor Farmers Market ~ Mentor
- Thief River Farmers Market ~ Thief River Falls
- Warren Farmers Market ~ Warren

BRIGHT SPOTS

In their book, Switch, Dan and Chip Heath cite the value of driving changes by identifying and replicating ‘bright spots’. Even in the most challenging situations, these bright spots of innovation draw on the practicality of local knowledge. Market representatives shared these bright spots from the 2012 season.

- Permanent shelter at Mahnomen market
- Fergus Falls is rebuilding the market with help from public health staff
- Created the Rivers & Prairies regional logo
- Faithful & supportive customers
- Guest chef at Mentor market ~ very good promotion

**Integrated Communications and Marketing**

Rachel Lundbohm and her IMC class created an Integrated Marketing and Communications Campaign for the Farmers Markets in Northwest Minnesota last fall semester. In this service learning project, the students in the class learned and applied marketing and communication concepts from coursework to a group project. Representatives of the markets attended both the introductory session and the final presentations. Instructor Rachel Lundbohm compiled a series of

- Bagley market looking for a family friendly location
- Crookston location has changed ~ now looking at permanent structure
- Planted carrots & lettuce in August selling through November
- Polk County Public health teaching people to use produce
- The appreciation expressed by customers, (for example, for a homemade apple pie.
- High tunnel strawberries through October 30th
- Market booth at Beltrami fair with coloring contest
- Market bucks & EBT pilot at Bemidji area market
- Expand to CSA or farm shares
- Restaurant business expanded
- Felt like a “varsity player”, feel like I know what I’m doing
- Hearing stories & positive experiences
- Established Oshkaabewisag Community Coop
- Solar dehydrator to process/preserve
- What kind of signage works?

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**Market Promotions in 2012 season**

During the 2012 season, several of the recommended promotional activities were supported by NW RSDP and North Country – Polk-Norman-Mahnomen SHIP. Additional promotional activities were supported by MN Grown.

- MN Grown created the Rivers & Prairie Regional logo
- MN Grown provided 5000 copies of the directory with a custom cover featuring the logo and a listing of farmers markets in the region.
- MN Grown provide 100 laminated posters with the farmers markets listed by day of the week.
- NW RSDP provided membership fee for initial year for new markets to be listed in directory.
- SHIP and NW RSDP provided signs for all markets featuring the regional logo.
- SHIP and NW RSDP provided reusable bags to the markets.
- NW RSDP provided support for marketing in newspapers as well as templates featuring the logo.
- NW RSDP supported an intern for 8 weeks.
Retail Management
During spring semester, Courtney Bergman and her retail management class conducted service learning project as well. Class members presented strategies for market vendors to increase sales and activity like loyalty programs, creating inviting market stands, using social media and personalized marketing.

See one of the student’s presentations on our YouTube page, http://www.youtube.com/user/NorthwestRSDP

MN GROWN RESOURCES
Paul Hugunin gave an overview of the resources, services and products available through Minnesota Grown to its members. Farmers Markets that are members of MN Grown can use the logo, both regional and statewide, on signage and print media promoting the market. Vendors who are individual members can also use the stickers, price cards and tags. All members have profiles online and can choose to be in the print directory as well.

Paul also described how markets and vendors can take advantage of the MN Grown’s website and facebook page. Members can provide photos, images and news updates for their profile page. MN Grown’s page has nearly 8000 ‘likes’. Markets are encouraged to post to the page. If you are not a facebooker, you can send photos and posts to Jessica Miles for posting on the page.

See http://minnesotagrown.org for information on membership. Markets need to complete membership forms by early February to ensure

This window cling is available through the NW RSDP, Public Health offices and the Farmers Markets for retailers who feature products from the region.
Terry Nennich updated the markets on activities of the MFMA. In addition to providing affordable insurance for its members (both market and farm members) the MFMA provides education and training opportunities to its members. It hosts two workshops each year, and will launch the on-line Market Manager Certification training early in 2013.

The MFMA developed the Farmers Market Manual, which can be downloaded at http://mfma.org or purchased in hard copy format. MFMA has taken a lead role in piloting technology for accepting EBT cards and credit cards. In 2012, nine markets in the state piloted EBT readers. It is working with BCBS and Department of Health to expand the availability of this technology to more markets in 2013.

Key learning from pilot phase
- Markets with a hard-wire telephone line have many reliable reader machines from which to choose.
- Cellular technology has proven challenging; it has been hard to find machines that are reliable and durable for the outdoor market environment and can be serviced locally.
- Technology is only part of the answer. Even with EBT readers on site, there is need for outreach and engagement.

Proposed promotion for 2013
- MN Grown Rivers and Prairie Region logo
- All markets in the region are MN Grown members and therefore in the printed directory.
- Custom cover features markets by day of the week
- Establish radio station partners in promotion - Purchase radio ads to cut costs for each market. Create common promotion language, plus options for customization.
- Laminated posters similar to the custom cover with space to write local events
- Additional signage with logo for markets
- Light-post banners

Communications specialist:
- Hire a person to assist the markets with facebook and other social media.
- Create listserv for markets in the region, foster communication among markets
- Design and deliver loyalty programs
- Host virtual meetings with market managers and vendors, focused on peer learning. Lynda from Baudette market suggested speaker.

For more information:
extension.umn.edu/rsdp/northwest

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