

Kathy Rhoads, Rhoads Family Farm Market  
May 6, 2005

Our participation in the Senior Market Nutrition Program is a little unique in that we “take the farmers market to the Seniors.” We rove between high-rise apartments, senior centers, and assisted living facilities with our trucks and tents, providing fresh, home grown produce directly to the clients of the nutrition program. We value the focus of the program and agree totally with the intent to supply the needed fresh produce high in health and nutrition to the senior population.

This is also an opportunity as a farmer to impact the economies of local communities with a win-win situation pairing the growers with the buyers. Circleville is a medium size community and has it limits on customer base. We expand on our business by selling produce in the city at different farmers markets where for centuries, landmark marketplaces provide for farmers to sell their wares.

Farmers markets always need new and repeat customers to grow. The program has allowed this to happen. Weekly we notice new and old faces shopping for only the freshest, highly nutritious homegrown produce. Often they bring their families, friends and neighbors for the social experience. We see young children learning from the grandparents not only how to shop, but getting exposure to unknown fruits and vegetables. There is the sharing of tips on how to prepare and enjoy the foods between buyer and seller.

There is a sparked growth in ethnic diversity and this program is able to serve them. Different cultures seek other food items, opening doors for new crops to be grown by the

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farmers. Often, the open marketplace is replica of where they shopped daily in their home countries.

We have found that some seniors who need the program the most are homebound or unable to find transportation to the marketplace. This is where our “roving markets” come to play. “One day while selling outside the window of a lady, 81 years of age and stricken with multiple sclerosis, we met her caregiver shopping for a few items with the coupons. Later, we received a lovely thank you note in the mail expressing her gratefulness for the opportunity. This is only one example of the many thank yous, hugs and greetings we receive.

This experience has a lasting impact on our staff, many who are college students. The interaction provides a better understanding and appreciation between generations and adds value to life for everyone. Often there is no family around to give this attention.

What is a day like for us in preparation for a roving market? Lots of planning and organization go into this monumental task. We load, and unload, load, and unload, package and repackage many times over. We want to provide as many increments as we can to the \$20 in coupons they have to redeem. We package in small amounts and put them into value packs of \$1, \$2 and \$3. Quantity and price matter. We try to keep our customers happy while allowing them to shop quickly so the lines don't become long and cumbersome. Most of the packaging is done the day before as we rise with the Sun to load the trucks. Our days are long, usually 9-10 hours in length before we return home.

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How do we measure our successes? We look at the rate of redemption. We also look to see if we were able to reach the areas and clients who need the program the most. We review the farmer's side of the program to see if all needs are being met.

What can we do for the future success of the program? All stakeholders need to give public comment in Washington DC and on the state level to increase the dollars provided and their distribution for the program. This administration has identified the need for expanded nutritional programs and this one is very worthy of continuation and increased funding. A conference such as this to exchange ideas and suggestions between other counties and states will help to better administer the program.