

Project #2: Chef at the Market

Project Summary

The Alaska specialty crop industry is growing; in 2007 the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service recorded 686 farms in the State and in 2012 the number was up to 762 – an 11% increase. Alaska has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of farmer's markets; in 2005 there were 13 markets; in 2015 there were 44 markets. These trends represent that not only are the number of farms growing in our State, but there is also a growing interest in local food production. This increase has resulted in many more Alaskans being exposed to Alaska Grown specialty crops. In an effort to enhance the competitiveness of Alaska Grown specialty crops, Chefs gave demonstrations at Alaska farmers markets showing how to utilize Alaska Grown specialty crops available at the market that day.

This project was launched with State funding in June of 2011 and enhanced with 2011 SCBG-FB funding. It has not been submitted to nor funded by any other State or Federal grant program. It was the goal of the project administrator to identify other funding sources and ways for the project to become self-sustaining beginning in 2016. However, due to current budget constraints with the State of Alaska and lack of additional funding opportunities, Chef at the Market will not continue in 2016.

Project Approach

In March of 2015 Division staff announced the availability of funds. Six applications were received, requesting \$16,750 dollars for 42 different events. \$20,000 was available for Chef at the Market (CATM) 2015. A review committee evaluated, scored and ranked the proposals. Six projects were selected for funding and contracts were signed. Staff communicated with Chefs on a regular basis to ensure that specialty crops were the focus of demonstrations. Market demonstrations took place June-December 2015.

Goals & Outcomes Achieved

The 2015 CATM project was highly successful. Forty-Four CATM events took place in 2015 with 4,468 consumers engaging with the demonstrations. The specialty crops highlighted included: Broccoli, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, garlic, herbs, kale, lettuce, onions, peas, pepper, potato, rutabaga, tomato, turnips, and zucchini.

Each market manager was provided an example sheet of how to gather sales data for market sales on CATM demo day's vs regular market days. They were allowed to use their own form, reporting tool, etc. due to the wide variation in management styles – i.e. some markets require daily sales reporting while the majority of markets do not gather any sales information at all. The results of the market sales data were mixed.

Six of the seven participating farmer's markets noticed an increase in attendance on CATM demo day's vs other market days. All markets reported either the same amount of sales or increased sales on CATM demo days. This was based on anonymous vendor surveys. We were not able to capture actual sales data because the vendors would not share that information with the Farmers Market Managers. Managers gave various reasons for why sales remained the same. Some of the reasons include: bad weather deterred customers from visiting the market, CATM demos held on a weekday had less

customers than CATM demos on a weekend because more people visit the market on the weekend, lack of crop available to purchase because of poor/small harvest.

Percent increase in sales on CATM days for specialty crop vendors:

Our goal was to see a 15% increase in sales for specialty crop vendors on CATM days. Unfortunately, we were not able to collect actual sales data from the markets primarily because the majority of the Farmers Market Managers do not collect sales data from their vendors. In 2014, getting the sales information was unsuccessful, even trying to get the vendors to tell us anything about their sales was difficult. In 2015, on the Market Manager Evaluation form, we asked them if they saw no change in sales, some increase in sales or a large increase in sales. Market Managers also passed around forms to vendors, where vendors told us if they saw a change in sales on CATM days vs non-CATM days.

As a result, the only data we were able to collect was through the survey results, summarized below, instead of actual sales and percent increase in sales.

- Market sales information for all markets that submitted data showed mixed results. On average, sales remained the same or increased on CATM demo days vs non-CATM demo days. Survey responses pointed out that there were other factors to consider when looking at an increase in sales. For example, there is more customer traffic on Saturdays versus Wednesdays; therefore, there will always be more sales on Saturdays compared to Wednesday regardless if there is a CATM demo or not. Weather is another factor, some market managers commented that the days on which the CATM demo took place and the weather could have affected sales numbers. If it rained on a CATM demo day, then there were fewer customers at the market than on sunny market days.

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of this project include specialty crop producers, Chefs and the general public. Specialty crop producers saw increased sales at the market on the days of the demonstrations. Chefs developed their customer base, gained valuable support and furthered their relationships with Alaska Grown specialty crop producers. Members of the public benefited from increased awareness and knowledge about specialty crops.

Direct beneficiaries of the project include the approximately 370 specialty crop producers at the five different farmer's markets on CATM demo days. The 4,468 people who learned new techniques for preparation of specialty crops are also beneficiaries.

Lessons Learned

This year, chefs were provided additional funds to create marketing materials, such as signs and banners, for their demonstrations. All chefs that took advantage of these funds reported customers coming to their demonstrations because they saw the signs and banners.

Many chefs reported that their main challenge was unpredictable weather. The weather made demonstrations difficult some days due to high wind and rain.