

**“Pay the Farmer, Not the Doctor”
A Standing Rock Native Gardens Coalition Success Story
DP08-81903CONT10**



Increasing access and availability of local produce and traditional foods through the pilot Long Soldier District market (Fort Yates, North Dakota) is an important achievement for the Native Garden Project. Development and coordination of this market has been an important shared experience for members of the Standing Rock Native Garden Coalition (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Diabetes Program Native Gardens Project, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Nutrition for the Elderly Program, Native Gardens Project Elders Advisory Council, and Sioux County Extension Service). These partners worked to achieve mutual goals of interest in promoting healthier lifestyles and Standing Rock communities. Staff from these programs coordinated the market every Friday, beginning July 10, 2009 and kept it going through a “winter” farmers’ market as well.

The market opened at 9:00AM and closed when produce was sold out—generally before noon. This shows there was a high demand for fresh fruits and vegetables in Standing Rock. Some of the most popular items were timsila (wild turnips), chokecherries, wild plums, cucumbers, Hubbard squash, crooked neck squash, corn, potatoes and onions. Many of these fruits and vegetables are key ingredients in traditional foods like papa soup, wojapi, and wasna.

Native Gardens Project: DP08-81903CONT10

Altogether 16 residents sold wild foods and garden vegetables at the market this year. These people provide Standing Rock Communities with healthy foods that can treat and prevent diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even cancers. People across the country are learning to “pay the farmer, not the doctor”.

In addition, the market was a center of activity offering, not only fresh produce and traditional foods from local gardeners but also, advocacy and encouragement for growing pesticide-free produce, education about diabetes prevention and healthy lifestyles, and food demonstrations. Food demonstrations focused on contemporary and traditional methods of food preparation and preservation (e.g., making chokecherry patties, corn wasna, sugar-free jelly, maple syrup from local trees). Food demonstrations became “winter” farmers’ market events as harvest ended in order to maintain a presence as a community resource for families and individuals interested in learning about and sampling traditional foods as well as times to meet socially and have fun.

The market was a success for many reasons as coalition partners shared their strengths and assets. Many of the gardeners that participated in the farmers market received assistance from the Native Gardens Project to till garden plots in the spring. Native Gardens provided seeds, guidance on gardening methods, problem-solving support, and other supplies. This year, a long-term partner for tilling gardens at Standing Rock, the National Relief Charities from Rapid City, also helped with tilling.

The Nutrition for the Elderly Program was involved in a USDA Food and Nutrition Services partnership with the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) that encouraged community members to purchase fresh produce. Through this grant, \$50.00 vouchers for fresh produce were distributed to elders (60 + years old, lower than 185 percent poverty level). 347 elders and their spouses received vouchers which were redeemed at the farmers’ market.

Native Gardens Project: DP08-81903CONT10

The majority of vouchers were redeemed at the Long Soldier Farmers' Market. A total of \$17,350 was issued in vouchers; 52 percent were redeemed.

Among Standing Rock Sioux Tribe communities, three farmers' markets were supported through SFMNP vouchers in North Dakota (Long Soldier, Bismarck with two locations, and Mandan), two market days in South Dakota (Mobridge). 37 vendors were certified as SFMNP participants (including four roadside stands).

Sioux County Extension Service as well as the Nutrition for the Elderly Program staff and participants provided contemporary and traditional foodways demonstrations at the Long Soldier Market that were fun. A total of nine events were held that included preparing such traditional foods as corn wasna, chokecherry patties, maple syrup, elderberry cough syrup, gabubu bread and soup. Approximately 138 people attended these events.

Implementation of the SFMNP voucher program for consumers works hand-in-hand with the operation of the farmers' market in facilitating policy changes described in "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States (*Strategy 5: Communities should improve availability of mechanisms for purchasing foods from farms; Strategy 6: Communities should provide incentives for the production, distribution, and procurement of food from local farms in the local jurisdiction.*)

This year, the Director of the Nutrition for the Elderly Program was able to have dried teas added to the list of items that could be purchased with vouchers—an important policy change for USDA and for families as they reclaim traditional plants for medicine.

The farmers' market is also an important potential economic resource as individuals and families engage in gardening as well as food preservation (making jams, dried teas, etc). Produce and products can be easily sold at the market.

Native Gardens Project: DP08-81903CONT10

Based on coalition member interviews, one of the biggest challenges faced are the number of other projects coordinated and delivered by coalition members (beyond the Native Gardens Coalition and the market). Clarifying agency roles and responsibilities supported a better understanding of all the factors that affect the level of contribution and participation in the Native Gardens Coalition projects. Shared commitment and dedication helped the market to be a success. However, being present is demanding and the coalition is working on its principles and task lists in order to improve communication. Recruiting more partners is suggested this year and figuring out how to delegate more tasks per activity or event.