

## SUMMARY

The goal of the Binghamton Farm Share Capacity Building Project has been to further refine and expand Binghamton Farm Share to create a sustainable model. Technical trainings have been provided for producers that will help them meet the program's growing demand for shares while also developing educational materials for consumers to improve customer retention.

This year we held three technical trainings for our farmers based on their own needs-assessment and on customer surveys from the past year. We continued to create new, easy to navigate educational materials for the customers including quick guides for less common vegetables and disseminated them over the course of the year. A member education intern was brought on this summer specifically to talk with members about their produce and understand more their knowledge gaps.

## OBJECTIVES/PERFORMANCE TARGETS

- Increased sales: Sales continued to increase in 2016. Our member base went from 110 to 135 weekly shares sold (a 23% increase, just shy of our goal of a 25% increase), that's over 400 members of our community that participated including 133 children.
- Program sustainability:
  - This season we again increased volunteer staffing at distribution sites. Most sites had at least 2 volunteers, sometimes 3 depending on volume. This allowed one volunteer to accept payments while the other handed out the shares and gave some information about the produce that the member was receiving. Over 400 volunteer hours were recorded.
  - We kept the added \$1-\$2 fees to the cost of shares generating \$4,000 in program income
  - Over \$10,000 in discount funding was used by our members. In fact, by July all of the funding was spoken for. Our partner farms allowed us to use their discount programs to supplement our discounts allowing us to serve approximately 25 extra people.
- Labor Training: Our technical training in April of this year pertained to labor force. Farms wanted to discuss ways of obtaining labor, what other farms were doing to retain their labor force and understand fair labor practices. Eric Denk, Agriculture Labor Program and Communications Specialist for the Department of Labor, came to speak to our farmers about compliance for both workers and growers and brought many resources to share. As well, each farm shared their unique ways of obtaining and retaining labor.
- Advanced Marketing Training: In the late spring of this year we provided a technical training to help our partner farms understand more advanced marketing strategies. This training further discussed the use of social media, concentrating on the importance of branding and storytelling in all marketing outlets. Farmers learned how to create a marketing plan and timeline that was feasible to use during the busy growing season.
- Share Refining Training: This year we concluded our training series at Main Street Farm with a discussion on refining produce selection for the target demographic that BFS works with, people with limited access to and funds for fresh produce. BFS distribution volunteers and members of BFS presented feedback that they receive from members and helped the farmers to understand the realities of trying to eat healthy on a budget. It was

helpful for the partner farmers understand that our members may not have ample refrigerator space, access to proper kitchen utensils, storage, etc. Many of our members have never cooked before or have very little cooking experience. Productive conversations were had revolving around how best to maximize the member benefit while ensuring the farmers were receiving fair compensation. The distribution volunteers, now familiar with the farmers, can in turn help the members to understand how the farmers make their selections for shares and bridge gaps that may occur.

- Overall customer satisfaction, knowledge and retention: Customer retention this year was up to 75% increased from 70% in 2015. Building upon our success with the “Care for Your Share” and “Storage Guide” materials we created in 2015, this year we created storage guides for herbs, cooking with greens, a pantry stocking and meal planning guide, and introduced a “Veggie of the Week” guide for less common produce. For the Veggie of the Week initiative we offered a recipe with a sample featuring that vegetable accompanied by a quick guide for ways to prepare, short and long term storage and some nutrition information.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS/MILESTONES

### **November 2015-April 2016:**

- 2 Technical Assistance trainings for partner farms were held (Labor and Advanced Marketing)
- Yearly program report posted on VINES website
- Article published in Cornell Small Farms Quarterly Newsletter

### **April-May 2016:**

- BFS sign-ups open for customers
- Educational materials for customers were updated; new educational materials created
- “CSA 101 Workshop” held

### **June-September 2016:**

- Customer pre-surveys collected
- Educational materials for customers were distributed
- VINES farm visits conducted
- Mid-season Member Education survey administered to understand where we can fill in knowledge gaps with customers

### **October-December 2016:**

- On-farm training (refining shares) for partner farms held in conjunction with post season meeting to debrief on the season, provide feedback from customer surveys, and discuss opportunities for improvement
- Customer post-surveys collected and analyzed, shared with partner farms
- Panel presentation in November at Food and Health Network’s Growing Health Forum: Fruit & Vegetable Prescriptions

## IMPACTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS/OUTCOMES

Data gathered thus far indicates the continuation of Binghamton Farm Share growing in a sustainable nature. 180 families were part of Farm Share over the course of the season – 135 shares were sold nearly every week showing a retention rate of 75% which was an increase of approximately 5% from 2015.

Through end of the season customer surveying we found that customer satisfaction increased, specifically satisfaction with packaging, freshness and overall quality. Most of our partner farms instituted improved packaging practices this season after the training last fall. Additionally, there were less packaging complaints noted in the end of the year surveys.

From previous year-end surveys we knew that we needed to continue to grow our Member Education. We brought on a Member Education intern specifically to help us further develop that aspect of our programming. We held the “CSA 101 Workshop” in May educating customers on different aspects of CSAs: how weather impacts the crops, what produce is local to our area, how to prepare for their CSA each week, store produce for the short and long term as well as identifying some local produce which members may be unfamiliar with and preparation tips. In August we offered the “Five Week Farm Share Challenge” where our customers were encouraged to interact with Member Education answering storage and nutrition trivia questions, taking photos of dishes they made with their shares and completing a survey so we knew what gaps needed to be filled.

We brought on an additional farm for distribution this year, Main Street Farm, who we have worked with on this grant. Main Street Farm worked with us to create a small share specifically for BFS members.

In November we presented at the Food and Health Network’s Growing Health Forum on Fruit & Vegetable Prescriptions. This was a half day workshop for community-based organizations, healthcare, retail and agriculture to explore the impact of fruit and vegetable prescription programs and local opportunities. After a presentation by Skye Cornell, Chief Programs Officer for Wholesome Wave, representatives from local organizations, including Binghamton Farm Share, presented information on our specific programming and weighed in on opportunities and challenges facing both our organizations and those that we serve.