

The Development of the Successful Cimarron County Conservation District Farmers Market.



The idea was shared and interest sparked: Within the scope of my job description as programs coordinator for the Cimarron County Conservation District, Boise City, Oklahoma, I, Iris Imler, search for and develop, with the Board of Directors’ guidance, educational and awareness programs for the Cimarron County area. With the demonstration of need and after researching other successful Farmers’ Markets, I along with Cherrie Brown, NRCS DC, and Jim Belford, equipment manager, approached the Board with the idea of developing and managing a Farmers' Market for 2012 that would specifically provide local producers and others across the Oklahoma panhandle region and the 4 adjoining states of New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, and Kansas, the opportunity to sell directly to consumers. If successful we would have the Farmers Market annually.

As a Conservation District, it is our mission to protect our natural resources for now and for future generations. If our producers have a venue for products grown or made from crops or plants that utilize our natural resources of air, water, soil, and plants, care of those resources would be vital to the production of those crops or plants. Droughts have affected not only our crops but also the income for our rural area. Many are struggling to survive with the minimal income or at the lending agencies mercy. We believe this local Farmers' Market would assist many producers by providing an outlet for their wares and much needed additional income.

Per guidance from Director Hal Clark, Main Street Farmers Market Director, I contacted Melyn Johnson, Guymon, OK , for information on the status, success or nonsuccess, laws and rules governing Guymon’s Farmers Market. Ms. Johnson was quite helpful and provided copies of information that was given to vendors.

Producer interest:

To inquire about producer interest, flyers were made and distributed county wide in convenience stores, post offices, restaurants, and stores. Handouts were given out at the Cimarron County Farm Show and District office. Post cards were sent to those known to have produce. News articles searching for producers and buyers were sent to the five state area newspapers – Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

A budget was developed:

Signs, equipment, supplies, advertisement, and salary for managing employees are expenses that are necessary to promote and manage the Market that cannot be funded by state allocated funds granted each year through legislation to the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the 87 conservation districts housed statewide. Expenses would have to be offset by charging each

Budget for Cimarron County Conservation District Farmers Market:

3	"Sandwich" board signs to direct traffic to the market	\$400.00
2	Rolls of yellow restricted engineering tape to prevent traffic in market	\$ 16.00
2	5.5 ft. "T" posts for tape to create barrier	\$ 9.00
1	Sidewalk chalk to delineate booth area	\$ 6.50
2	Reams of copier paper for flyers and vendors' packets	\$ 17.00
2	Color printer ink for flyers and vendors' packets	\$ 36.00
2	Black printer ink for flyers and vendors' packets	\$ 29.00
2	Large metal trash cans for market area	\$ 70.00
1	Box of 50 can liners	\$ 33.50
4	Boxes of pocket folders for vendors' packets	\$ 44.00
2	Boxes of file folders for records of each vendor	\$ 68.00
1	Box of file labels	\$ 24.00
300	Reusable 12"x14"x10" Market bags with CCCD address and contact information	\$675.00
1	One time setup fee for printing on bags	\$ 70.00
13	3"x4" Boxed advertisement in Boise City Newspaper each week for 13 weeks to a circulation of 1500 @ \$54.00 a week.	\$702.00
	Total	\$2200.00



vendor and would cause a reduced income seen by the vendor. Something we did not want to do as it would take from their income at the Market.

"Sandwich" road signs to guide customers to Farmers' Market, banners, boxed advertisements in the local and area newspapers, paper/ink for flyers and posters for advertisement handouts, after hours salary for one/two employees for management, were immediate funding concerns.

Funding possibilities:

An internet search for grants began with little to no success for funding much of anything in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. The USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program and an online agency, NUSAF (New USA Funding), who searched for us, were not successful. The Oklahoma Grown Farmers Market grant only allows sells from Oklahoma producers with Oklahoma grown produce. Our unique location would be welcome to Texas, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico and Oklahoma producers. So this grant was not available.



Letters to utility companies, banks, organizations, individuals requesting donations were sent. The First State Bank of Keyes and the Cimarron County Chamber of Commerce were the first to grant funds to the project.

OACD introduced a micro grant project. Application was immediately submitted and we were one of the awardees selected for the \$1000.00 grant in 2012.

Promotion and Advertising:

Letters were sent to known gardeners, crafters, etc. with ads placed in the surrounding states' newspapers. Flyers were posted in businesses area wide. The sandwich road signs were placed at various locations coming in town and around the courthouse square.

Location:

The 2012 location was in front of the office building for District employees' convenience and the use of the paved area. The building would also provide protection from the west afternoon sun. The street signs were set up at various locations to advertise the Market open. The 1st and 3rd Friday turned into every Friday per request of the vendors. The hours were 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. the first and third Friday but the vendors sold out within the first hour of set up.



Taste testing salsa, jelly, jams and checking out the produce.



Waiting in line to purchase vegetables, homemade bread, Cinnamon Rolls, etc.

Concerns: Customers drove through instead of getting out. We ran out of space with the Market being open during office hours. Parking was restricted. Ideas and changes for the 2013 season were being tossed around.

2013 Farmers Market:



As planning for the 2013 Farmers Market began the District conducted an informational meeting with interested producers and the OSU Extension Director present. Changes, rules, taxes, and other vital information were shared.

Director Kenneth Rose asked the First State Bank of Boise City about the use of a vacant lot south of the courthouse square. Permission was granted and an agreement entered. Three canopy tents were purchased with individual donated funds.

Dates were changed to include every Friday beginning July 26 through September 13 with new hours of 2 p.m.-6 p.m. although each were sold out by 4-4:30 p.m.



New and returning vendors with a variety of goods participated in the successful 2013 Farmers Market. Notes were made on changes for 2014. The Cimarron County wind destroyed three tents although they were weighted and staked down. With the heat on the vacant lot during the duration of the Market, something will have to be used for shade. New signs for each section are planned. Grants will be pursued for funding the needs.



Rabbits, salsa, vegetables



Fresh smoked baby back ribs, chicken, sausages



Homemade pies, cookies, cinnamon rolls, vegetables, melons, and baled hay.



Salsa, fresh bread, fresh butter, eggs, honey butter, pot holders, vegetables

Successful results of the Market:

Each vendor intends to return next year and will make plans with their 2014 gardens.

One vendor called weekly to express her appreciation for the Market and to ask for a tent. She was struggling financially and said she was able to pay her vehicle insurance and other bills with her sales.

Another sent a thank you as the Market assisted her with medical and travel expenses incurred with her cancer treatments.



Davis Cobb assisting Grandma Davis and Great Grandma Hitchings with their sales.

We are looking forward to the 2014 Cimarron County Farmers Market!

Cimarron County Conservation District Board of Directors and employee

Kim Hitchings, Hal Clark, Harold Dawson, Kenneth Rose, Jack Schnauffer, Iris Imler