



Foothills Farmers' Market 2011 Annual Report

2011 marked Foothills Farmers' Market's fourth year of operation and produced some exciting growth and change.

Implementation of a **new membership program** provided an opportunity for customers, organizations, and vendors to lend their financial support to market operations and to have a voice in key decisions. During 2011, we attracted 48 individual members (\$10 each), 9 organization members (\$25 each), and 40 vendor members (\$25 each), representing a financial commitment to the market of \$1,705.

NC Cooperative Extension secured grant funds of \$45,746 from the **USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program** on behalf of FFM to support a range of branding, expansion, outreach, and advertising efforts during 2011-12. To date, this funding has been used to purchase a 1951 Ford "Produce Special" Flatbed Truck (our head turning, rolling billboard), advertising benches, billboards, brochures, table tents, print ads, radio spots, note cards, post cards, bumper stickers, a major website upgrade, and other high-profile marketing items. We also contracted with Dr. Michele Ferrier, a marketing consultant from Elon University, who helped us develop a strategic communications plan that included customer newsletters delivered to more than 1,700 subscribers each week by email. As a result, we continued to draw more foot traffic to the market each week. Remaining grant funds will be invested in additional marketing and promotions activities during 2012.

Foothills Farmers' Market was formally incorporated and received its **501(c)(3) non-profit designation** with pro bono legal assistance from Steve Virgil with the Wake Forest University School of Law. This designation opened the door for FFM to apply for a range of grants and receive tax-deductible gifts to support key projects and activities, including construction of a new permanent market facility.

With approval from Shelby City Council, plans to construct a **market shade pavilion** in Uptown Shelby moved forward quickly. To date, we have received commitments of more than \$120,000 toward the \$279,000 project from a variety of sources, including City of Shelby, County of Cleveland, Cleveland County Farm Bureau, Dover Foundation, Weathers Family Foundation, Cleveland Association of Government Officials, Town of Mooresboro, NC Cooperative Extension, and Foothills Farmers' Market. We are positioned to receive major funding through USDA Rural Development's Community Facilities and Rural Business Entrepreneurship Grant Programs in June, 2012 and hope to start construction later in the 2012 market season.

We continued our **peak-season satellite market** at the Cleveland County Health Department on Tuesday mornings during June, July, and August and piloted a test satellite market at the Ruby C. Hunt YMCA in Boiling Springs on Thursday evenings.

Foothills Farmers' Market continued its commitment of giving back to the local community by partnering with Shelby Breakfast Rotary Club in a second year of **Farmer Foodshare**®. This volunteer and farmer-led program collects fresh fruits & vegetables at our Uptown Shelby market and distributes it through a network of human services agencies that feed the hungry in our local community. During

2011, vendors and customers contributed 2,758 pounds of food. A companion project, **Community Gardenshare**, provided individuals, families, and groups with free vegetable plants grown by local farmers. Participants committed to giving a portion of their harvest to Foodshare, contributing an additional 2,511 pounds of fresh tomatoes, pepper, squash, cucumber, and melons during the 2011 growing season.

FFM supported a range of community activities to heighten awareness of local agriculture and appreciation of local foods. These included:

- **Farm to Table Progressive Dinner Motorcoach Tour** coordinated by Tour Cleveland County and held September 10
- **Meet Up to Eat Up** local foods potluck suppers held monthly at a variety of local farms, homes, and public venues throughout the community
- **RAFI Showcase Tour** coordinated by NC Cooperative Extension on November 19 to highlight the accomplishments of four local farmers who used cost-share grants to implement projects that have created new sources of agricultural income
- **The Greenhorns** documentary film screening and young farmer panel discussion at The Gibson Theatre in Uptown Shelby on November 19.

