

## 2013 Annual Report Foothills Farmers' Market, Inc.



2013 marked Foothills Farmers' Market's sixth season of operation. Our season offered new challenges and opportunities, and produced growth and positive change. Our farmers struggled with one of the wettest growing seasons on record. Despite problems with planting and harvesting, plus challenges imposed by disease, insects and weeds, they came through good form by offering an amazing assortment of local foods throughout the market season. The demand for local foods continued to grow, with 64% of vendors reporting increased customer foot traffic as compared to the previous season.

**New Kings Mountain Satellite:** Thanks to start-up funding provided by Neisler Brothers Inc., the hard work of site manager Margot Plonk, and the collaboration achieved by community leaders and volunteers, we piloted a 9-week satellite market in Downtown Kings Mountain. This trial market was so successful that it will be expanded to a full-season market in 2014.

**Card Services:** We made great strides in our efforts to make local foods more accessible to low-income citizens. The Community Transformation Project catalyst coordinator procured equipment & supplies, and developed a system that allowed FFM to accept debit and EBT cards at our three market locations. A grant provided by the Kate B. Reynolds Trust Fund allowed FFM to hire an EBT project coordinator to conduct targeted outreach and offer incentives to low-income market patrons. Card services sales provided participating vendors with \$15,000 additional income during the 2013 season.

**Market Growth:** Vendors reported an average seasonal income of \$5,281 in 2013, an increase of \$1,806 from the previous year. Seventy-two percent (72%) of vendors were able to grow their businesses during the 2013 season, mostly through increased production (62%), adding new/different products (54%), and participating at new market locations (39%). Eighty-eight percent (88%) of vendors plan to sell with us again in 2014.

**Community Outreach:** FFM sponsored a public documentary film series to heighten community awareness of food-related issues and to shape attitudes and behaviors about local foods and sustainable agriculture. Four (4) films were screened during July through September at the Don Gibson Theatre in Uptown Shelby. These were advertised via social media, newspaper print ads, and weekly customer newsletters. Approximately 180 people participated.

**CSA Project:** FFM coordinated a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project that allowed customers to pay an up-front subscription fee in order to receive a box of fresh, local food each week. Two 10-week subscription periods were offered at a cost of \$350 each. The ten (10) producers who supplied foods for the boxes shared \$4,844 in additional sales.

**Marketing and Promotions:** FFM implemented a number of strategies aimed at increasing visibility of our market locations and raising awareness of the economic, health, environmental and social benefits of local foods. Key marketing strategies included billboards, weekly newspaper ads, quarterly magazine print ads, weekly electronic customer newsletters, and frequent social media posts. FFM invested approximately 25% of its operating budget on advertising during 2013.

**Farmer Foodshare:** Thanks to the generosity of farmers & community members, FFM in Uptown Shelby collected 2,000 pounds of local food between June and December 2013, and distributed it to area organizations working to relieve hunger in Cleveland County. Our 2013 recipient organizations included Crossroads Rescue Mission, Central United Methodist Church, Lighthouse Women's Shelter, UCAN (Upper Cleveland Area Needs) Food Pantry, Neal Senior Center, Cleveland County Schools Parent Resource Center and Community Baptist Church Food Pantry. Our Kings Mountain market collected 960 pounds of food that was donated to the Central United Methodist community kitchen feeding ministry.

**Resource Development:** The Community Transformation Project provided supplies, equipment, promotional items, and other enhancements totaling \$10,554 to FFM during the 2013 season. Other resources procured to benefit market operations include: \$5,851 from Neisler Brothers, Inc.; \$44,768 from the USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program, and; \$2,500 in advertising cost-share from the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services.